

Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia, 1996–1999

Jemma Purdey



ASAA Southeast Asia Publications Series



THE UNIVERSITY OF

MELBOURNE

ANTI-CHINESE VIOLENCE IN INDONESIA

1996–1999

Jemma Purdey



Asian Studies Association of Australia
in association with
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I PRESS
HONOLULU

First published by:

Singapore University Press
an imprint of NUS Publishing
AS3-01-02, 3 Arts Link
Singapore 117569

Published in North America by:

University of Hawai'i Press
2840 Kolowalu Street
Honolulu, HI 96822
www.uhpress.hawaii.edu

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Purdey, Jemma, 1974-

Anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia, 1996–1999 / Jemma Purdey.

p. cm. — (Asian Studies Association of Australia Southeast Asia publications series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8248-3057-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8248-3057-1

1. Chinese—Indonesia. 2. Chinese—Violence against—Indonesia. 3. Ethnic conflict—Indonesia. I. Title. II. Southeast Asia publications series.

DS632.3.C5P87 2006

305.895'1059809049—dc22

2005028030

Cover photo: Looters burning a portrait of Indonesian tycoon Liem Swie Liong and his wife in front of Liem's house in central Jakarta. Photo by Oscar Motuloh.

Printed in Singapore

For Tom



PANCASILA



KETUHANAN YANG MAHA ESA

KEMANUSIAAN YANG ADIL DAN BERADAB

PERSATUAN INDONESIA

KERAKYATAN YANG DIPIMPIN OLEH HIKMAT KEBIJAK -
SANAAN DALAM PERMUSYAWARATAN / PERWAKILAN

Keadilan sosial bagi seluruh rakyat Indonesia

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Preface

In mid-May 1998 brutal violence raged through Jakarta, Solo, Medan and other cities of Indonesia. Most victims of the massive property destruction were Indonesians of Chinese descent, who comprise little more than two per cent of the country's population but account for a high proportion of private business capital. During the mass violence one thousand indigenous (*pribumi*) urban poor were killed in fires inside shopping centres that they had been encouraged to loot and Indonesian women of Chinese descent were targeted for gang rapes on the streets and in their homes. Years later urban poor victims and Chinese Indonesians are still fighting for justice and compensation and for a greater sense of security in the nation they call home.

When I began researching anti-Chinese violence during the early part of 1998, no-one predicted the brutality and systematic nature of violence that would follow a few months later. As the effects of the Asian economic crisis began to push up the prices of basic goods across Indonesia, violent incidents against Chinese-Indonesian shops and other property in Java became more frequent and appeared to be condoned by the government. When the May violence exploded in Medan, Solo and Jakarta — the most concentrated and vicious of its type against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia's recent history — many Chinese Indonesians fled the country and others sent their money abroad out of well-founded fears, further weakening the nation's failing economy. Suharto's resignation one week later did little to ease their fears.

This is a study of anti-Chinese violence within a period of social, political and economic transition and chaos in Indonesia. Beginning in mid-1996, Indonesia underwent a slow but steady revolution. Its people were beginning to demand a greater role in the politics of the state. Everywhere in society — in the media, politics, non-government organisations, student groups and labour groups — people acquired the courage to move against Suharto's New Order government and became more outspoken. Indeed it was this increased confidence and self-assurance among Indonesians that eventually forced Suharto's resignation on 21 May 1998. Despite this regime change, anti-Chinese violence

continued in late 1998 and early 1999. This period is an important focus of this study for what it reveals about the nature of 'anti-Chinese violence' as a social construction in a weak state. This violence did not occur alone. Besides the ongoing secessionist conflicts in Aceh, West Papua and East Timor, other types of ethnic and religious violence broke out around the country in West Kalimantan, Maluku and East Java.

It is surprising that the story of anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia has not yet been written with ethnicity as its master narrative. Explanations seem to skirt around ethnicity as a causal factor in its own right. Master narratives highlighting economic competition and racialised state terrorism have dominated existing interpretations of this violence. Although ethnicity and prejudice are recognised as a factor, these studies do not position it as central to the violence, but as a basic sentiment (or tool) to be manipulated. Given that any explanation must begin with the fact that the victims of the violence are ethnically different from the majority population, before then acknowledging the decidedly complex range of other factors involved, ethnicity is fundamental to any complete understanding of this violence.

The subject of this study is *large-scale* anti-Chinese violence during this period. This includes incidents involving attacks on more than one target, often in more than one place, thereby denoting a more general and non-specific motive. In order to clearly separate violence that is localised and has discrete motives the study does not include single attacks on churches, shops or houses owned by Chinese Indonesians. Where possible, I have attempted a narrative of a selection of events of violence. The choice of incidents was based on a variety of factors including the level of destruction, the public and political responses to these cases, and the continuities or discontinuities between incidents. This preference was also influenced by my access to materials about certain events (documents, witnesses, reports) and by the decision to present incidents of violence against Chinese Indonesians, which had a range of different motives.

In each case I identify the origins of the violence and provide a consistent narrative of how it unfolded as recounted and reported by news agencies, community groups, religious organisations, witnesses, victims and the state. From these different information streams and in accordance with Paul Brass's advice: 'We might listen to all the interpretations of violence, especially those on site, who have seen it, participated in it, or somehow been close to it',¹ I have shaped what I perceive resembles 'what happened' during and also after each incident. In itself this process required making judgements, as all researchers

must do, about different representations of these events, to produce my own authored narrative with all the shortcomings of this form. I have sought to expose the operations, interests and politics behind these interpretations by way of interrogating the authenticity of the narratives presented. The 'story' of each incident is placed within the context of analysis of the organisational forms and structures of the violence; the systems and networks that allow it to occur; including the state, the 'institutional riot systems' of *preman* (gangsters, thugs) and criminals and the 'repertoire' of the crowds. Through presenting analysis of the events occurring in Indonesia's political economy, alongside investigation of the violence, the way in which state and public discourse impacted on these events is borne out. I am also conscious that the emotion and suffering of these experiences should not be overlooked. The outcome is one provisional truth of these violent events, which seeks to add to the range of 'potential realities'.

The book is divided into three chronological parts separated by the May 1998 events: July 1996–April 1998; May 1998; and June 1998–October 1999. The intensity and brutality of the violence in May 1998, together with evidence of their systematic and simultaneous enactment, marks this period as a 'climax' in the violence against Chinese Indonesians from 1996–99. The mass violence in May 1998 also presents the greatest challenge for someone endeavouring to write a narrative of these events. Whilst violence occurred in several Indonesian cities more or less simultaneously, public discourse and official representations of the violence have focused on events in Jakarta. A significant mass of documentation and analysis of this violence already exists, including reports assembled by a government-appointed body the Joint Fact-Finding Team (*Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta*, henceforth referred to as Joint Team) and civil society organisations. In this case, because of the scale and political and social significance of the violence the researcher is crowded with myriad contested versions. Thus, rather than attempting to create a 'new' narrative of the Jakarta violence, I offer a critique of the 'official' version of the violence as presented in the Joint Team report commissioned by President Habibie in July 1998.

As an alternative to the Jakarta-centrism of existing narratives, this study approaches the 'May violence' through presenting analysis of the cases in Medan and Solo. The study of the Solo violence in May 1998 (in particular, representations of that violence produced by its residents and others afterwards) demonstrates the power of alternative interpretations as Veena Das wrote, 'to constitute the meaning of the violence for people in different social positions'.² The Medan case provides a

highly localised context for analysing the violence in May, yet at the same time reveals its national reach.

My proximity to the 'history' I was researching and writing meant that the study was challenged by complications of emotion and immediacy. At the same time, it meant that the actors in the stories and their memories were accessible to me in a way that they would not have been if I had undertaken this research even a few years later. The most obvious impact on this book is the emphasis given to the victims of the violence and recognition of the need to look for alternative version of violent events. Some of my most important sources became the victims' support organisations and womens' NGOs, which emerged at this time as the frontline for human rights in a post-New Order Indonesia. From this contact I grew to understand the responsibility to its victims of such writing on violence. Furthermore, I was very interested in the interactions between these groups and Chinese-Indonesian community organisations. In Jakarta these groups worked together closely on actions calling for justice and came together for healing.

Sixty years after Indonesia's independence, Indonesians of Chinese descent still find it difficult to define their position in the nation. They continue to struggle to find a way to identify themselves as both ethnically Chinese, and Indonesian. Under Indonesian nationalism they are regarded as being an homogenous ethnic group and also as different from the indigenous or *pribumi* population. The decision about what to name them is itself one of the difficulties facing this group of Indonesians and also this study. What do we call a group that is, after several generations as Indonesians, increasingly assimilated into the majority 'Indonesian' culture and which has been virtually forced to do so by those in power since the mid-1960s? How should we name a group that does not consider itself to be homogenous? This study recognises these distinctions, but it uses the inclusive term 'Chinese Indonesians' for all Indonesians who under the law are recognised as set apart from indigenous Indonesians on the basis of separate legal requirements regarding identification and proof of citizenship.

I have made the decision to avoid labelling these violent incidents as 'riots'. Although Donald Horowitz asserts that 'ethnic riot' is synonymous with 'ethnic violence' or with 'racial', or 'tribal disturbances',³ classifying these acts of violence as 'riots' is too prescriptive of the agency of those involved. Regardless of academic subtleties, in more general usage the term 'riot' assumes that these are incidents of crowd or 'mob' violence in which the participants are similarly motivated. It is an emotive term that, in many ways, dismisses the reality of these violent

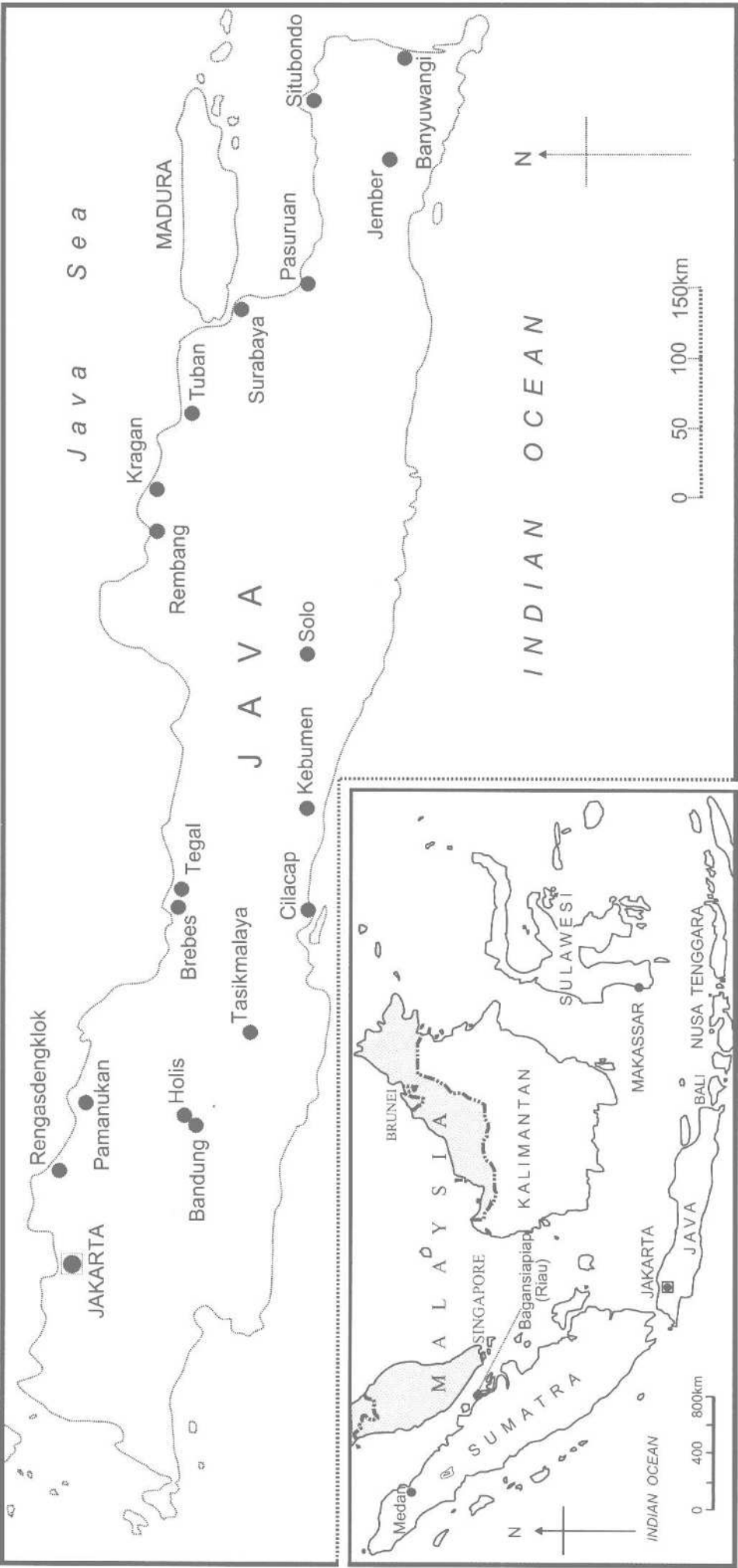
acts. The term *rusuh* (riot) in Indonesian has the same effect as *amok* (*amuk*), as a term of reference presented in an almost automatic manner to describe these acts. Using *kekerasan* (violence) instead of *kerusuhan* (riot) calls for a deeper investigation of the sources of agency and responsibility. With respect to violence against Chinese Indonesians in particular, avoidance of this term makes it possible to position these incidents alongside other types of violence in Indonesia, without discrimination.

My thanks go to my friends and family who have always encouraged and supported my interest in Indonesia. In Indonesia there are a large number of people I need to thank who assisted me with my research when I visited in 1999 and 2001. In particular I thank the Leksono-Supelli family for showing me the most extraordinary kindness and generosity and for allowing me to become part of their family. I especially thank the brave and inspiring Karlina who not only acted as my host, but also guided me through the networks and politics of NGOs in Indonesia. In the same way thanks to Amir Sidharta, who gave me an insight into the perspectives of Chinese Indonesians in Jakarta. For their assistance with information in Indonesia thanks to Esther Yusuf and everyone at Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa, Albertus Sugeng at GANDI, the members of SIMPATIK, Thung Julian, Mély Tan, Imelda from FRONT in Bandung and Widi, Bowo and friends from SEMADI also in Bandung, Pak Bingky, Pak Oei and Pak Hendi from INSPIRASI in Surabaya, and most of all everyone at TRuK, especially Citu and Rinto for their friendships. I am greatly appreciative to all the people I was privileged to meet in Indonesia. Some of their names appear here but they are too numerous to mention. I am indebted to the Department of History at Melbourne University for providing facilities, funds and collegial support. Thanks also to the Arts Faculty and the School of Graduate Studies for travel and other grants, which allowed me to visit Indonesia and attend conferences. Thank you to a team of readers including Arief Budiman, Charles Coppel, Tom Dobson, Brigid Delaney, Ariel Heryanto, Celia Purdey, Jon Booth, Kristen Hilton and Tim Lindsey for their wisdom, time and patience. Thanks to Donna Williams for her editorial assistance and to The Kian Wie and Claudia Prestel for their comments on the final manuscript. Special thanks to Connor Bailey for being generous with his knowledge of the fishing industry in Bagansiapi-api, and to Helen Pausacker for sharing with me her vast collection of materials from Solo. Also to Kate McGregor and Nicki Tarulevicz for their friendship and encouragement and to Derek McDougall who has been a great support from the beginning. Immense thanks go to Howard Dick for his support

and guidance in bringing this book to publication. My final thanks are reserved for Charles Coppel for his great inspiration, intellect, patience and friendship over the years. Charles introduced me to an area of study I had never envisaged and with his guidance I returned to some of my early passions for human rights and justice. Finally, to Tom; this would not have been possible without you.

A Note on Translation

All translations from Indonesian to English are my own unless otherwise indicated. In some cases I have quoted from the English language version of an Indonesian newspaper published on the Internet, and in these cases the title is given in English in the citation. The same is true of the reports from Volunteer Team for Humanity (TRuK) and the Joint Fact Finding Team (TGPF), which are available in both English and Indonesian versions. I have used modern Indonesian spelling for Indonesian words, names and place names included in the book, except in cases where individuals have retained the older style of spelling.



Map of Indonesia and Java.

1

Chinese Indonesians: A Minority in the Middle

On 14 May 1998, in the north Jakarta suburb Tanjung Priok, shouting and banging disturbed the owners of a local basic goods store. The shop was located on a leafy residential street off a main road. It was owned by a Chinese-Indonesian family who had lived in the area for many years and whose children, including a daughter Lia in her twenties, had grown up playing in the street and attending school with their neighbours and regular customers. The family had been alarmed by the violence elsewhere in Tanjung Priok itself and in the greater Jakarta area over the past 24 hours and had closed their shop and locked the house, although they had not felt the need to flee. However on 14 May a crowd attacked their shop and the house behind it, and unable to break the windows and doors, they gained access through the roof. As the looters descended, the children and their grandmother sought refuge in the home of a pribumi (indigenous) neighbour whilst their parents tried to defend their home. As Lia struggled to help her elderly grandmother across the street to the safety of their neighbour's house, the old woman slipped and fell, injuring her hip. Among the looters were people known to the family, including the local meatball seller, who made off with a television set. Others stole the photocopier from the store and then later tried to sell it back to the family for a high price. A year after the attack the family were operating their store again, supplying basic goods to the neighbourhood. Lia, however, could not continue to live in the area. She was simply too afraid of confronting those who had terrorised her family.¹

Lia's story is timeless. Ethnic Chinese across generations and localities in Indonesia can recount similar tales. As members of a small ethnically distinct minority, Chinese Indonesians have periodically experienced

violence across various regimes, rulers and political models.² This violence has often coincided with social, political and economic change at the national level, but it is also driven by local concerns and conflicts. Like Lia's family, ethnic Chinese in Indonesia are predominantly engaged in trade and commerce and, though only two per cent of the population, are estimated to control a large proportion of Indonesia's private business capital. They are also more likely to be Christian, Buddhist or Confucian than to follow the majority religion, Islam. Symbols of this wealth and other markers of their difference as 'foreigners' including religious ones are targets of this violence. The thread of violence against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia runs through the history of the settlement of Chinese traders and merchants in the archipelago over hundreds of years, giving rise to a constant pattern of prejudice and discrimination.

INDONESIA'S ETHNIC CHINESE MINORITY

In Indonesia state racism has a history longer than the history of the Republic. Maybe even older than the entity known as the 'state' (Goenawan Mohamad).³

Indonesia's national slogan *Bhinneka Ika Tunggal*, Unity in Diversity, celebrates difference. Adopted at independence in 1945, this principle allows Indonesians to also have a regional and ethnic identity, a *suku bangsa*; to speak the languages of their region as well as the national language. They are *pribumi* or indigenous Indonesians. This diversity is, however, limited to ethnic groups with claims to a territory of origin in the archipelago. Being migrants, Chinese Indonesians have no claims to any specific territory, although they are concentrated in some particular locales. For example, ethnic Chinese make up 30 per cent of the population in Pontianak, West Kalimantan; 10 per cent in Jakarta and 13 per cent in Medan, North Sumatra.⁴ They are spread across the islands and speak many local languages, yet are still seen by many Indonesians as a group whose claims for belonging in Indonesian nationalism are partial.

Nation-ness, and hence the distinction between Indonesian and non-Indonesian, are only a step away from the ethnic dichotomy of *pribumi* and non-*pribumi*. Nothing illustrates this better than the New Order's grandiose national park, the Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, 'Beautiful Mini Indonesia Park' ... we find nothing representing the lives of fellow nationals of Arab, Indian, Chinese or European ethnicity.⁵

Figures on the numbers of ethnic Chinese as a percentage of Indonesia's population were made possible for the first time since 1930 by the inclusion of a question related to self-identification of ethnicity and race in the 2000 census. Using these results and their own analysis, Leo Suryadinata and his fellow authors of *Indonesia's Population*, calculate that ethnic Chinese make up a mere 1.5 per cent of the Indonesian population.⁶ This is based on various assumptions, but most importantly that Chinese Indonesians are under-represented in the census data. The authors maintain that up to 25 per cent of people of Chinese descent would not identify themselves as such when completing the census. Therefore they estimate the proportion of ethnic Chinese to be as high as 2 per cent of the total population, although it is a figure Jamie Mackie still considers to be too low.⁷ Why might Chinese Indonesians not declare their Chinese ethnicity? The authors speculated that the memories of the 1998 violence were still fresh for many and frightened them off. But we also must consider that many Indonesians of Chinese descent whose families have lived for generations in Indonesia may indeed no longer regard themselves to be anything but Javanese or Sundanese and so on. A young Indonesian friend once told me about a simple survey in her geography class, during which the teacher asked people to raise their hands according to their *suku bangsa* or ethnic group. She was surprised when 90 per cent of her classmates whom she perceived as ethnic Chinese nominated another group, even though Chinese (*Tionghoa*) was an option to be taken.

Indonesian nationalism embraces plurality of religion through the *Pancasila* (Five Principles) contained within the preamble to the 1945 Constitution, which was intended by Sukarno to lay down the basic values of Indonesian political culture, whilst allowing freedoms of religion and ethnic expression. According to this doctrine, Indonesians must believe in God Almighty and adhere to one of the five officially recognised religions — Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism and Protestantism. Islam is overwhelmingly the dominant religion in Indonesia with 88 per cent of the population, followed by Christianity (9 per cent), Hinduism (2 per cent), Buddhism (0.8 per cent) and Other (0.2 per cent). However, the omission from the 2000 census of alternatives including Confucianism, or the option to nominate as agnostic or atheist, means that some individuals are obliged to provide false data.⁸ For example, a Chinese Indonesian who is Confucianist may identify herself as Christian for the purposes of the census. Although the census data do not provide explicit figures on the nominated religion of Chinese Indonesians, the results do

allow us to compare the figures related to concentration of ethnic Chinese by province with the distribution and concentration by province of Christians, Buddhists and Other (most of whom are to be Confucian). The correlations support this impression of ethnic Chinese as mostly belonging to religions other than Islam.⁹

The naming or identification of people of Chinese descent in Indonesia as an ethnic group, both by themselves, and by others, has constantly been contested and re-defined from colonial times to the present day. Under Dutch colonial policy at the turn of the previous century, Chinese were included with Arabs and Indians as 'Foreign Orientals', legally distinct from Europeans and Natives. At the same time, ethnic Chinese recognised divisions among themselves as a heterogeneous group. The basic distinction was between the terms *peranakan*, meaning Indonesians of Chinese descent who were born in Southeast Asia and spoke a local language, and *totok*, more recent arrivals in Indonesia who mostly were born in China and spoke a Chinese language in the home. By the time of the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, many *totok* Chinese were further divided into pro-Communist and pro-Kuomintang groups. Ethnic Chinese are also religiously heterogeneous, belonging to Islamic, Christian, Buddhist and Confucian faiths. These distinctions and those made by the terms *totok* and *peranakan* between ethnic Chinese who still identify with Chinese culture and those who speak Bahasa or a local regional language are not accommodated by the classifications commonly made in Indonesia such as '*Cina*' (Chinese) or even by the more polite *suku Tionghoa*. As my friend's confusion about the self-identification of Indonesians of Chinese descent demonstrates, the wider Indonesian public is largely unaware of these cultural variations. Moreover, since Indonesia declared its independence as a nation state until today, the legal status — citizenship — of Chinese Indonesians has remained a point of contestation around their perceived loyalty and eligibility to 'belong' to the nation.

A 'HISTORY' OF ANTI-CHINESE SENTIMENT IN INDONESIA

(I)f the process by which either the content or boundary of an ethnic identity is constructed itself yields violence, then we would *surely* say that the social construction of ethnicity is relevant to the explanation (Fearon and Laitin).¹⁰

Traders from southern China were well established in the port cities of Java when the Dutch arrived at the end of the sixteenth century. Periods of immigration and emigration followed. In 1740 in Jakarta (then Batavia) anti-Chinese violence led to the deaths of thousands of Chinese residents. The outbreak was attributed to the influx of Chinese in response to the sugar boom and subsequent conflicts with the ruling Dutch.¹¹ In the wake of this devastation of the Chinese population, the smaller and largely *peranakan* community remaining in the colony were kept under tight restrictions on their legal access to landowning, residence and education. Under the system first put in place by the Netherlands East India Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*), Chinese were the colony's revenue and tax farmers and constituted 'the economic arms of governments in rural areas'.¹² This system reached its height in the nineteenth century before being dismantled beginning in the 1890s. With the closure of the revenue and tax farms and particularly the opium farms, Chinese lost their main leverage over local economy.¹³ Because they no longer enjoyed exemption from colonial pass laws, they also lost access to the rural markets. As Chinese sought new opportunities, some moved into industries previously dominated by *pribumi*, including batik textiles and cloves (*kretek*).

Early Twentieth Century: Sarekat Islam and Nationalism

At the turn of the twentieth century a nationalist movement awakened. Fatefully for ethnic Chinese, this coincided with the Chinese Revolution in 1911 and establishment of the Republic of China in 1912. It was also at this time that the Netherlands Indies government abandoned its policy of segregation, whereby Chinese were required to reside in ghettos and to obtain passes to move around the colony: 'they [Chinese] became "emancipated" into the modern struggle of rival rootlessnesses, seeking new nationalist identities in the age of mass-based politics'.¹⁴ The number of China-born Chinese in Indonesia had risen with an influx of labourers in 1880, which also saw a rise in Chinese solidarity as the nationalist movement in China gained momentum. In 1900 Sun Yat Sen visited Southeast Asia and the same year Chinese in Indonesia established the Chinese Association (*Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan*, THHK) and Chinese schools. This enthusiasm and solidarity with a modern Chinese identity was in part a reaction to their more vulnerable position under Dutch rule.

Meanwhile, the government had kept a watchful eye on the rise of Chinese nationalism amongst ethnic Chinese in the colony but as late

as 1908 were confident that such sentiments were not evident among the indigenous population.¹⁵ The emergence of the first ethnically mixed associations (*kongsi*) and potentially the spread of 'dangerous' ideas to the indigenous population therefore caused alarm. *Kongsi* have been variously described as chambers of commerce, associations and unions. In modern usage the term refers to 'any kind of association, from a club to a limited company'.¹⁶ It was the break up of one such ethnically mixed *kongsi*, the Kong Sing in Surakarta in 1911, to which historians attribute the origins of the first organised popular nationalist movement in Indonesia, *Sarekat Islam*. When its Javanese members split from Kong Sing in 1911, they clashed violently with the Chinese. It is argued that the behaviour of Chinese in the Netherlands Indies as a consequence of the revolution in China became increasingly self-assured to the point of being 'haughty', and soon led to antagonisms between the groups.¹⁷ Takashi Shiraishi claims however, that it was manipulation by the government of the rise in solidarity among Chinese Indonesians that facilitated the split.

Therefore, though by 1911 nationalism had reached the Indonesian masses, it had also marked out cleavages between the Chinese and indigenous communities.

The rise of modern politics provided an opportunity for the Dutch Indies state to adopt a new strategy. It signified the 'awakening' of the Chinese as Chinese and the 'natives' as natives It was no longer necessary to require Chinese and natives to wear their own distinctive dress ¹⁸

Though sharing common goals related to nationalism and the end of Western domination, for Indonesian nationalists 'Chinese were a problem insofar as they supported that [China] regime'. Further, though syncretic in their 'imagining' of the Indonesian nation, and anti-colonial not *anti-Chinese* in nature, for this movement 'Chineseness became an important "other" against which the new national identities defined themselves'.¹⁹

The establishment of *Sarekat Islam* (SI) in 1912 marked a watershed for ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. As Kees van Dijk describes it, at this time 'slumbering anti-Chinese feelings manifested themselves in a concrete form all over Java for the first time in the twentieth century. The founding of the Sarekat Islam was a consequence as well as a contributing factor to this.'²⁰ SI appealed to ordinary Javanese, the *wong cilik*, who joined its cooperatives and neighbourhood security systems and who

were mostly Muslim. This was a time of increasing unrest and polarisation in the colony. By 1918, when mass violence took place at Kudus, including a series of disturbances and riots against ethnic Chinese carried out by members of SI — ‘the group identification of the rioters was explicitly Islamic’²¹ — these racialised structures were in place. Once the Chinese ‘were no longer needed as the state’s financiers, they became vulnerable to popular hatred and they were politically powerless’²²

The Independence Struggle and Anti-Chinese Violence

As the nationalist struggle in Indonesia reached its height, ethnic Chinese again experienced violence and anti-Chinese sentiment and were as a consequence torn in their loyalties. Throughout the Japanese occupation and struggle for independence, many ethnic Chinese held nationalist sympathies, but violence against Chinese communities by Indonesian revolutionaries and the general turmoil of this period meant that many sought to remain neutral. The prime concerns of both *peranakan* and *totok* Chinese were the safety of their families and property. These circumstances gave rise to great doubt among many supporters of independence as to the loyalty of ethnic Chinese to the future Indonesian nation.

Under the Japanese occupation of 1942–45, Chinese communities suffered violence at the hands of both the Japanese and the indigenous population, but the incidence was erratic. Hostility from the Japanese towards perceived Kuomintang sympathisers was a product of the long-running Sino-Japanese War. Particularly in the chaotic initial stages of the occupation in March 1942, Chinese were targeted for violence carried out both directly by Japanese and, with their encouragement, by *pribumi*.²³ Subsequent violence against ethnic Chinese occurred in the context of political violence by the Japanese against suspected dissidents. The so-called ‘Pontianak Affair’ in late October 1943 saw large-scale arrests and executions of ‘prominent persons’ to suppress a suspected multi-ethnic rebellion. Of the 1,500 killed by the Japanese, including *pribumi* and Europeans, the largest group of 854 were Chinese.²⁴

During the independence struggle with the Dutch there was further violence against ethnic Chinese. The most horrific took place in May 1946 in Tangerang, Java, where more than six hundred Chinese were killed. In the midst of the vacuum created by the advancing Dutch forces and retreating revolutionaries, armed bands of radical Muslims attacked ethnic Chinese. As Somers-Heidhues observed, many of Chinese descent

were no longer physically distinguishable from the general local population and stood out only by their religious difference and higher economic status.²⁵

Relations between *peranakan* and indigenous Indonesians during the Japanese occupation and independence struggle shed light on the crucial role of anti-Chinese violence and sentiments among the people in this formative period. Although independence leaders were sympathetic towards ethnic Chinese, they were unable to prevent sporadic violence against them. 'Violence in the Indonesian revolution caused alienation of *peranakans* and *asli* (indigenous) Indonesians, despite the attempts of *asli* Indonesian leaders to encourage *peranakan* support.'²⁶ The continuing violence suggested a depth of community resentment and hostility that left many ethnic Chinese wary of an independent state. Following the violence in rural areas like Tangerang, many Chinese fled to the cities. As the Dutch had control of the cities and towns this was considered by many Indonesians to be a further demonstration of pro-Dutch sympathies.

Independent Indonesia: Loyalty, Legality and Citizenship

The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which other nations lie.²⁷

The defeat of the Republic of China by the communists in 1949 and the Kuomintang's retreat to Taiwan, took place at a crucial moment in the configuring of the Indonesian state and affected the place of Indonesians of 'foreign' descent within it. For their part most ethnic Chinese Indonesians saw a communist China under Mao as considerably less attractive than an independent Indonesia. The legal position of ethnic Chinese Indonesians required clarification. To which nation were Chinese Indonesians loyal?

Ethnic Chinese *peranakan* and *totok* who were born in the Netherlands Indies and whose parents were domiciled under the Dutch administration were legally regarded as citizens of the new state of Indonesia. This followed the legal principle of *jus soli* or the 'right of the soil', whereby an individual's nationality is determined by a person's place of birth. However, although legally regarded as citizens, ethnic Chinese lacked the same legitimacy as *pribumi* Indonesians of 'belonging' to the nation.²⁸ They were treated as separate from indigenous Indonesians and their situation continued to be insecure.²⁹ This was reflected in

some legal distinctions included in the 1945 Constitution drafted at this time. Article 6 of the 1945 Constitution states that 'the President shall be a native born Indonesian (*orang Indonesia asli*)'. Article 26, refers to citizenship rights stating, 'citizens shall be native Indonesians (*orang-orang bangsa Indonesia asli*) and those of other races (*orang-orang bangsa lain*) who are confirmed as citizens by law'.³⁰

There were further complications. Under Chinese law a person was considered a Chinese citizen according to the principle of *jus sanguis*, 'law of the blood', whereby nationality is passed from parents. This meant that the Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent under Indonesian law were also still claimed by China. In 1951 the countries attempted to address this conflict by signing the Roundtable Agreement on Citizenship. Under the provisions of the agreement, those who did not reject Indonesian citizenship would be regarded as dual nationals of both China and Indonesia. There was, however, a great deal of ambiguity around the status of dual nationals and it was perceived that their loyalties to Indonesia were dubious. In a new state that had just fought a long and bloody battle for its independence and was still in the process of struggling to configure itself as a nation, dual nationality was a concept that did not sit comfortably with many Indonesians. Ethnic Chinese themselves became politicised by this issue. In 1954 the first and largest ever Chinese Indonesian political party or mass organisation, Baperki (*Badan Permusjawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia*, Consultative Body for Indonesian Citizenship) — an organisation of *peranakan* Chinese — was formed in response to the impending introduction of a draft law that would have severely restricted the numbers of ethnic Chinese who could claim Indonesian citizenship. The opportunity for further clarification was taken in 1955 at the Conference of leaders of Asian and African nations in Bandung, where Indonesia and China signed the Dual Nationality Treaty. The treaty made provisions for ethnic Chinese with Indonesian citizenship to be released from Chinese citizenship. China thereby renounced its claims by the principle of *jus sanguis* to those who wished to be solely Indonesian citizens.³¹ The treaty did not come into effect until 1962, when around 390,000 ethnic Chinese — about two-thirds of with rightful claims to Indonesian citizenship — chose to reject their Chinese status.³²

Meanwhile, in 1956 an indigenous businessman, Mohammad Assaat, with the support of the modernist Islamic political party Masyumi, had launched a movement calling for affirmative action for indigenous business, effectively discriminating against ethnic Chinese, at the inaugural

meeting of the All-Indonesia National Economic Congress (KENSI). The Assaatist movement for economic nationalism fed rising anti-Chinese sentiment in Indonesia. Public opinion had remained suspicious of the loyalties of the ethnic Chinese, even of those who rejected Chinese citizenship in favour of sole Indonesian citizenship, believing that they were acting opportunistically rather than patriotically.³³ As the Assaat movement established branches across Java and in the Outer Islands, its message spread. 'The initiative had passed from businessmen who advanced economic claims with racist arguments to army groups, youth groups and a sensational daily [newspaper], groups which shared no clear goals but a powerful inchoate anti-Sinicism.'³⁴

Guided Democracy

As the status of Chinese Indonesians in the nation was being re-configured, Indonesia's political system was also undergoing an historic regime change. Sukarno, who had become frustrated by the constraints on his power under the parliamentary system, in 1957 made common cause with the Army to proclaim a state of siege under martial law. The government resigned in March and the army took on extensive administrative powers. Seeking allies to offset the 'army's resources of organisation and the means of violence', Sukarno gained the support of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).³⁵ In December 1957, in a period described by Herbert Feith as one of 'structural transition', in response to increasing economic nationalism and also signalling greater governmental intervention in the economy, Sukarno gave his tacit support to the take over of Dutch enterprises by PKI-led trade unions.³⁶ The military led by General Nasution then stepped in to take control of these industries by appointing army officers to enterprise boards of management, thus marking the first steps towards consolidating political, military and economic power in the hands of the Army.³⁷ In July 1959, following the failure of the elected members of the Constituent Assembly (*Konstituante*) to provide a two-thirds majority vote in favour of reinstating the 1945 Constitution, Sukarno dissolved the Assembly and reinstated the 1945 Constitution by decree. The system of parliamentary democracy, installed in 1949, was thereby brought to an official end. Declaring that Indonesia needed 'Guided Democracy', Sukarno instituted a system of soft-authoritarian rule whereby democratic institutions were curtailed, elections were suspended, and he as President appointed the parliament.

PP10

On the eve of the commencement of debates within the *Konstituante* about reinstating the 1945 Constitution, Sukarno departed on a two-month trip overseas, leaving in control the chief of the Army General Nasution and his *Kabinet Karya* (Working Cabinet). A series of events followed that would have serious impact on Chinese Indonesians. By early May 1959 the Muslim political parties who had been solidly opposed to the secular 1945 Constitution were calling for its Preamble to include the Jakarta Charter, commanding that Muslims practise Islamic law.³⁸ It was also at this time, that a series of military and governmental restrictions on 'alien' residence and trade came into effect with serious implications for Chinese Indonesians.

On 12 May General Nasution issued the Central War Administrator's Announcement No. 039 empowering regional commanders to impose controls over the residence and movement of foreigners. On the basis of the announcement, Col. R.A. Kosasih, Commander of West Java's Siliwangi division, issued his own decree banning alien trade and residence outside the cities after 31 December 1959. Two days later on 14 May, Trade Minister Rachmat Muljomiseno introduced legislation to ban the operation of alien enterprises in rural areas to take effect on 1 January 1960. Muljomiseno had an interest in the matter as both a politician of NU, whose constituency was rural Java, and an executive member of the indigenous entrepreneurs' association KENSI. The trade ban and the military ban on alien residency were 'companion measure(s)'³⁹ with the aim of removing 'alien' but specifically ethnic Chinese businessmen from rural areas to the advantage of indigenous business.⁴⁰ On his return to Indonesia and in his Independence Day speech later that year, however, President Sukarno shifted the rationale away from the racial push for 'indigenisation' of the 14 May ban to a socialist drive for private rural trade to be redirected through cooperatives. He stressed that all 'progressive funds and forces were welcome to participate in the development of Indonesia' through the new cooperatives, including non-indigenous businessmen.⁴¹ Nevertheless, efforts to play down the racialised nature of the bans were to limited effect.

When *Peraturan President* (Presidential Regulation) Number 10/1959 (henceforth PP10) was issued in November 1959 banning retail trade by 'aliens' (*warga negara asing*, WNA) in rural areas, it 'combined and slightly modified the previous regulations on alien trade and residence'.⁴² Complex political manoeuvrings surrounded the promulgation

and implementation of the ban, but ostensibly it remained a response to the sentiments expressed by indigenous businessmen through the Assaat movement in an era of heightened economic nationalism.⁴³ Although Sukarno's 'progressive funds and forces' doctrine was more inclusive, the ban referred specifically to *alien* traders, not all traders and Arab and Dutch 'alien' traders were excluded from the regulation.⁴⁴ Given the concentration of 'alien' Chinese in rural trade and commerce — there were around 85,000 involved in retail alone — this regulation had the potential to impact gravely not only on them but the economy as a whole.⁴⁵

The confluence of the PP10 with the Central War Administrator's announcement of 12 May, which delegated authority to regional commanders, meant that implementation was highly arbitrary from province to province. It was applied strictly in West Java and South Sulawesi, where the regulation was extended to a total ban on residence of all Chinese and not only 'alien' Chinese, but not at all in other parts of the country. About the treatment of ethnic Chinese in West Java, Goenawan Mohamad quotes newspaper reports from that time saying the military 'threw hundreds of Chinese families into trucks and took them to camps built with haste'.⁴⁶ Government estimates were that 25,000 shops were affected by the ban. In 1960 over 102,000 'alien' Chinese left Indonesia. In a normal year this number was 12,000.⁴⁷ In the regions where it was enforced most vigorously, the actions of the regional military command were not unlike a programme of ethnic cleansing. The reasons for the regional anomalies are complex, but they can be partly explained by the changing political structures at this time and Sukarno's careful balancing act in order to maintain his power. One argument is that Sukarno's association with the PKI and its socialist leanings was opposed by individuals within the military including regional commanders, who thus sought to interpret the decree autonomously. Conversely, Feith describes the currency of 'rewards' during this period of dispersed power. Such rewards included the take-over of Dutch enterprises by the military and 'a general relaxation of legal restraints on powerful military and civilian officials', in which regional and military commanders were given 'free rein' subject to political and ideological loyalty to the government in Jakarta.⁴⁸ Though it seems that Sukarno was opposed to a racially discriminatory application of PP10 and 'ultimately intervened to lessen the severity of the attacks on Chinese',⁴⁹ also being mindful of the desirability of good relations with China, his position and that of his government remains ambiguous.

In addition to protests from the Chinese government, the trade and residency bans did not go unopposed in wider Indonesian society. In response to PP10 and the military activities in West Java in particular, Javanese writer, and humanitarian Pramoedya Ananta Toer published a book in 1961 titled *Hoakiau di Indonesia* (Chinese in Indonesia), in which he was critical of the government's treatment of ethnic Chinese and in particular the implementation of the PP10. The government quickly banned the book. Pramoedya was arrested, interrogated and then imprisoned without charge for a year, after which he was placed under house arrest.⁵⁰

Integration versus Assimilation

After 1962 the two-thirds of all ethnic Chinese who had chosen Indonesian citizenship under the provisions of the Dual Nationality Treaty hoped that their now unambiguous status would lead to greater acceptance in the Indonesian nation. For the remaining one third who had not renounced their Chinese nationality, under Indonesian law these people were now 'non-citizens' or 'aliens' of questionable loyalty to the nation. In the years from 1963 to 1965, there emerged a more stable situation for ethnic Chinese in relation to the government. The ethnic Chinese political party Baperki opened Chinese schools and the Chinese language press was re-established. In 1963, in line with its integrationist approach, Baperki raised the possibility of a *suku Tionghoa* (Chinese ethnic group) based on the *peranakan* cultural community. This idea had the initial support of President Sukarno, but any hope was shortlived. In May a series of attacks on ethnic Chinese took place across West Java, beginning in the coastal town of Cirebon, then spreading inland to Sukabumi and finally Bandung. Each event occurred after a small clash or argument between an ethnic Chinese and a *pribumi*. A statement made by a local military commander in Cirebon at the time 'casting blame on Chinese for their ostentatious way of life during a time of economic troubles'⁵¹ demonstrated a level of political manipulation — or at least complicity — in the violence. Although condemned by the central government, the violence showed 'that the ambivalence of the authorities on racial issues could be exploited if the circumstances were appropriate'.⁵²

Meanwhile, Chinese Indonesians supporting assimilation had formed the Institute for the Promotion of National Unity (*Lembaga Pembina Kesatuan Bangsa*, LPKB) in opposition to Baperki's integrationist model. Though LPKB was established in 1961 on a platform of

assimilation as a means for expression of Indonesian nationalism, it was also in response to what some saw as Baperki's increasing leftist tendencies. The proponents of assimilation ranged in their approach from the extreme to the moderate. At the extreme were those pushing for complete assimilation through inter-marriage and the abandonment of all facets of Chinese identity, including name, customs and even religion in favour of the local culture and religion. '(T)hey stressed the obligations rather than the rights of citizenship ... to blame the Chinese themselves, at least as much as the indigenous Indonesians for the discrimination which occurred.'⁵³ In the context of the wider political struggle in Indonesia at this time between the Army, Islamic groups and the Communist Party, certain sides including the military took advantage of the split between the left *integrasi* and the equally radical but also anti-communist *asimilasi* sides of Chinese-Indonesian politics. The assimilationists accused Baperki of being 'exclusive' and soon found support for their cause from among sections of the military who were increasingly suspicious of Baperki's leftist leanings. Meanwhile Sukarno was making no attempts to maintain a balance in his support between the two groups. In December 1963 he appointed Baperki Chairman, Oei Tjoe Tat, as Minister of State. Although advantageous for Baperki at that time, less than two years later this close association with Sukarno would have fatal consequences.

The 1965–66 massacres are, collectively, the single most gruesome and bloody event of violence in Indonesia's history. The violence had the clear political objective of destroying the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) as a political force, but it escalated from known members and alleged supporters to revenge killings and bloody expropriation. We still have no reliable way of estimating how many people died during the killings, but a figure of around 500,000 people has come to be accepted.⁵⁴ As around just two per cent of the population, ethnic Chinese could be expected to have comprised a similar proportion of the victims. International media at the time cited high numbers of ethnic Chinese victims, but there is no hard evidence to support this.⁵⁵ As a result of PP10, by 1965–66 most ethnic Chinese lived in the cities, whereas the worst violence seems to have occurred in rural areas. Nevertheless, even in the main cities of Jakarta, Surabaya and Medan some violence was directed against Chinese persons and property. The violence did have an ethnic element. Baperki's proximity to Sukarno, the PKI and, by extension to China, gave rise to allegations of communist sympathies. With the rise of anti-communist forces in Indonesia in 1965–66, Baperki was branded communist and eventually, by implication,

all ethnic Chinese, until 'there was a general essentialising identification of this ethnicity with communism'.⁵⁶ Overwhelmingly the massacres were political, but the general lawlessness certainly gave opportunity for some to act out of jealousy and greed. Ironically, the Chinese-Indonesians bourgeoisie who had felt most threatened by Communism now suffered the backlash of insecurity.

The New Order

The socio-economic system that has emerged provides rewards to those who conform or at least do not rock the boat, but penalises dissidents or critics heavily. Hence the costs for any individual opposing the system are high.⁵⁷

The political system led by General Suharto, which emerged in 1966–67 was shaped by the chaos that had preceded it, convincing many of the necessity of a strong state. Harold Crouch described New Order politics by the term 'patrimonialism', whereby all control and power derived from the President, Suharto, and his Pancasila democracy.⁵⁸ There would no longer be ideological battles as there had been under Sukarno's leadership because, as Suharto stated in 1968, there was now only one state ideology, Pancasila. In a departure from Sukarno's more inclusive Pancasila, which at one point even allowed for the discussion of the possibility of a *suku* Tionghoa, Suharto's 'Pancasila democracy' increasingly stood for a depoliticised system. In 1969 he stated, 'In our democracy based on Pancasila there can be differences of opinion. What is not allowed is a sharpening of opinions that can result in dissension.'⁵⁹

From the early days of the New Order political stability justified as necessary for development was the highest priority.⁶⁰ This meant the suppression of anything more than token democratic practice and the suspicion of popular movements. To bolster political stability the New Order brought together an anti-communist coalition of functional groups (*Golongan Karya*, Golkar) as their 'parliamentary vehicle' or political party.⁶¹ The army, as one of these functional groups, was given a central role in political life with a '*dwifungsi*' or dual function. Of the five hundred seats in the parliament or People's Representative Council (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, DPR), one hundred were reserved for the military. Mass support for Golkar was easily mobilised through the civil bureaucracy as well as the military and through the government's co-opting of various other groupings including trade unions, student associations and religious organisations. By the 1971 elections Golkar

was strong enough to win 62 per cent of the vote against parties running on an Islamic platform (27 per cent) and those with a Democratic or Christian platform (just 10 per cent). In 1972 in a process of 'party simplification' these groupings were officially reduced to just two — the United Development Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, PPP) and the Indonesian Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia*, PDI).⁶² The role of these political parties within an increasingly authoritarian and symbolic 'democracy' was merely, as Stefan Eklöf explains, 'to demonstrate a broad consensus about the government's national leadership and to enhance the democratic credentials of the regime'.⁶³ With the oil boom in 1973–74, power became even more concentrated at the centre.

In 1978–79 the government forced further compliance through the introduction of the Pancasila indoctrination programme (Guidelines for the Full Comprehension and Implementation of Pancasila) known by the acronym of P4. Mass Organisation legislation (UU No. 8 1985) introduced in the mid-1980s forced all social groups, including religious and political organisations, to state the Pancasila as their sole foundation (*azas tunggal*). The government enforced a taboo on the public airing of potentially divisive issues relating to ethnicity, religion, race and inter-group relations. Symbolised in common parlance by the acronym SARA (*suku, agama, ras, antar-golongan*), it was strictly policed through media controls. The New Order was steadily eliminating or co-opting its opponents in a process described as 'the corporatisation of Indonesian politics and society' with Pancasila at its core.⁶⁴

As works by Tim Lindsey, James Siegel and Richard Tanter have shown, Suharto's response to non-compliance and opposition was often violent suppression.⁶⁵ The Petrus (*penembakan misterius*) or mysterious shootings of criminals in the mid-1980s is example of this, as was the suppression of Muslim protest at Tanjung Priok in September 1984 when members of the armed forces shot dead 28 Muslim demonstrators amidst anger that soldiers had defiled a mosque by entering without removing their shoes. For Suharto any disturbances, including those created by criminals and 'disaffected Muslim elements', threatened the stability of the nation.⁶⁶

Islam on the Sidelines

The formation of the PPP as an uneasy coalition of Muslim parties alienated Muslims from the political process. Islamic organisations including the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest with an estimated

30 million members, had played a large role in the mass assaults against communists from 1965–66 and had expected to be rewarded by the emerging political regime. Instead, they had found themselves excluded from power. Golkar engaged in vote rigging in the 1977 elections to further marginalise the PPP. The sense of alienation continued to grow. In 1984 after the deaths at Tanjung Priok, Abdurrahman Wahid (also known as Gus Dur), the leader of NU, withdrew his organisation from PPP, ostensibly in order to devote his organisation to religious and social works. Adam Schwarz argues, however, that Wahid's reasoning was in fact, 'more a reflection of his view that the Development Party [PPP] was a political non-starter'.⁶⁷ Commentators reflect that as the New Order pushed to depoliticise the system, Indonesians and Muslims in particular began to seek out an alternative political arena. As Mackie and MacIntyre wrote in the early 1990s: 'Islam remains a potentially powerful force, the mosques and their Friday seminars not easy to control under the New Order's ideological dragnet.'⁶⁸

Perhaps sensing Islam's revival, in 1990 Suharto gave his strong support to the establishment of the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia*: ICMI) headed by his close ally, future vice-president and Minister for Technology, B.J. Habibie, on a platform of reforming Islam.⁶⁹ Many commentators viewed Suharto's support for ICMI as part of a rapprochement with Islamic groups to balance his declining support from the Army.⁷⁰ In 1991 he and his family completed the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca. ICMI was established to formulate and to focus Muslim input into public policy and included a range of Islamic figures. These included modernists such as Amien Rais, leader of the second largest Islam organisation, Muhammadiyah, with around 15 million members. The organisation's support for affirmative action for Muslims 'meant, in the Indonesian context, efforts to achieve proportionate representation of Muslims in the political, military and bureaucratic spheres, where Christians and nominal Muslims had always been over-represented and had held many key positions'.⁷¹ Critics of ICMI including secularist intellectuals and non-Muslims but also Abdurrahman Wahid, felt that the 'reformist' approach to Islam would leave the traditionalists behind. Wahid was stridently critical of Suharto's motives for supporting ICMI and warned of the dangers of radical and fundamentalist anti-pluralist Islam, which he saw as running counter to democracy. Nevertheless, Suharto insisted upon total political control. Wahid and his supporters were a small but persistent concern, which Suharto then set about disarming.

Crony Capitalism

Meanwhile the other pillar of the New Order's legitimacy, economic development, was booming. In the decades between 1966 and the early 1990s Indonesia's economy expanded by almost five hundred per cent, with average growth of between five and ten per cent each year.⁷² Spurred by the oil boom in the early 1970s, Indonesia experienced an export-led growth with huge increases in manufacturing (12.5 per cent between 1965–91) and also in the resources and mining sectors. In the period from 1969–94 real GDP (Gross Domestic Product) increased threefold. Mass living standards remained very low, but the incidence of poverty did markedly decline. However, there was no accompanying institutional development. Corruption became rampant but the government shut out criticism by tight restrictions on press freedoms and civil liberties. Wealth became highly concentrated. It is easy to point to spectacular instances of private wealth accumulation and ostentatious consumption in Indonesia of the early 1990s.⁷³

Among those to benefit most from the success of the New Order's economic development were figures close to it, including President Suharto's children and their friends. Three of Suharto's children, Ny Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana (Tutut), Bambang Trihatmojo and Hutomo Mandala Putra (Tommy) were notable beneficiaries, each with diverse and extensive business interests in telecommunications, shipbuilding, agribusiness and, in Tommy's case, the controversial 'Timor' national car project. A Presidential decree issued in 1996 gave Tommy the contract to develop the 'national' car. However, a further ruling was issued stipulating that a licence would be granted to allow the Timor car to be manufactured in Korea for the first year of production with exemptions from import duties and luxury taxes. The Timor car project became 'a prime symbol for the nepotism of the Suharto family' both in Indonesia and internationally.⁷⁴ Others to benefit greatly from the growth of the Indonesian economy and Suharto's patronage were Chinese-Indonesian business tycoons such as Liem Sioe Liong (aka Sudono Salim) and Bob Hasan, about whom more will be said below.

China and the 'Alien' Chinese

The killings of 1965–66 put great strain on relations between China and Indonesia, which had previously been at breaking point over the PP10 bans on residency and trade and the associated forced expulsions from

the countryside.⁷⁵ There was also an increase in anti-Chinese sentiment among some Indonesians, who 'demanded the expulsion of all alien Chinese and a review of the citizenship of all WNI [Indonesian citizen] Chinese'.⁷⁶ Meanwhile it was doubtful whether the still insecure Suharto government would be able to rein in these forces. It officially admitted to difficulties regarding 'citizens of a certain country' that was hostile to Indonesia. Meanwhile, Assaatist views had re-emerged and there were calls to enforce PP10 more vigorously.

In 1966 demonstrations across Indonesia at Chinese embassies and consulates and news agencies and an increase in anti-Chinese violence led to an international diplomatic crisis. The Chinese language press had been closed immediately after the coup in early October 1965, likewise Chinese schools in May 1966. In May 1966 an estimated 10,000 'alien' Chinese were driven out of Lhokseumawe, Aceh. Reports say that they were forced to stand in the sun for hours and their bodies painted with anti-Chinese slogans.⁷⁷ In response to the expulsions, China sent a ship to Sumatra to repatriate a total of around 4,000 refugees.

As Mackie details in his writing on anti-Chinese violence in this period, by the end of 1966 it appeared that the central government sought to restrain anti-Chinese sentiment to prevent a mass exodus of Chinese, thereby further damaging the fragile economy.⁷⁸ However, officials and military commanders in the regions continued to carry out their own campaigns against Chinese, particularly in Aceh, North Sumatra, West and East Java and South Sulawesi. The types of restrictions imposed in these regions on Chinese nationals included the requirement to register for deportation and imposition of a head tax. In East Java in late December 1966 among the strict measures enforced by the regional military commander General Sumitro was a ban on Chinese nationals from carrying out wholesale trade across the province and on the use of Chinese language in commerce. Through 1967 there were frequent demonstrations by Chinese against these restrictions, often accompanied by violence. The suspension of relations with China in October 1967 went some way to diffusing the tense situation, but this was partly due also to the strengthening of the Suharto government and its ability to control its commanders in the regions.

Despite this cooling off in anti-Chinese sentiments, in October–November 1967 devastating violence broke out in West Kalimantan, where hundreds of ethnic Chinese were killed and an estimated 50,000 were forced from the interior to coastal areas, many into refugee camps where they lived in dire conditions. The reasons for this violence were

due to unique local circumstances and the absence of central government control in the province, but also related to a local push to reactivate PP10. In August 1966 at the end of Indonesia's campaign known as Confrontation against the new nation of Malaysia, the left-wing and mostly ethnically Chinese guerrillas of the PGRS (*Pasukan Gerilyawan Rakyat Sarawak*) remained in the jungle near the Sarawak border, hunted by armies on both sides. At this time the regional commander of West Kalimantan was, like his colleagues elsewhere in Indonesia, autonomously implementing variations of the PP10 and attempting to relocate Chinese Indonesians from rural areas. The PGRS launched an attack on government troops in July 1967 and villages, in which Dayaks were killed. The Dayaks struck back by burning Chinese villages, forcing residents to flee and killing anyone left behind. The authorities failed to respond to the Dayaks' actions. Rather, the outcome of the violence — the resettlement of Chinese from the inland areas of West Kalimantan to coastal towns including Pontianak and Singkawang — was in line with its earlier plans. When the order was issued from Jakarta in mid-November for a stop to the violence, it was more or less immediate.⁷⁹

The 'Chinese Problem'

The large alien minority was an embarrassment and it would be most convenient if it could somehow be made to disappear. Mass expulsion was not the answer, however, since that would plainly have a most disruptive effect on the economic stabilization programme ... mass naturalization of alien Chinese as Indonesian citizens seems to have been an unthinkable alternative.⁸⁰

In 1966–67 the newly established New Order government was torn in several directions on the status of Chinese Indonesians, which transcended domestic policy because of the ramifications for economic policy, trade and citizenship. In 1967 the New Order government formed a committee to examine the 'Chinese Problem' with a brief to find a way through the various contradictory positions. They agreed that expulsion was not the answer, rather that the ethnic Chinese had great potential for Indonesia. The challenge was to take advantage of their economic aptitude whilst eliminating their perceived economic dominance. During the communist purges and killings, the Baperki leadership had been either imprisoned or murdered and the organisation was outlawed. With the consolidation of the power of Suharto and the military it was therefore the assimilationists who took the leading role. Although founded as a

community organisation, the Institute for the Promotion of National Unity (LPKB) was soon established as a semi-governmental organisation with the role of advising the new government and facilitating Chinese assimilation.

Yet rather than promoting 'sameness', as the LPKB envisaged,⁸¹ the policy highlighted differences between Chinese Indonesians and *pribumi*.⁸² From 1966–67 the New Order introduced a series of laws and policies to suppress expressions of Chinese identity and culture, while at the same time highlighting 'Chinese-ness'. These laws and presidential instructions banned Chinese language, characters and cultural festivals and strongly encouraged ethnic Chinese to adopt Indonesian-sounding names.⁸³

The New Order thereby established a new *status quo* in which it could take advantage of an economically successful and skilled ethnic minority, which was also highly vulnerable and in need of protection. Subject to these constraints, Suharto encouraged Chinese Indonesian business through the 1970s and 1980s. These businesses played a large part in the success of Suharto's economic development programme,⁸⁴ which in turn allowed the government to strengthen its hold on power while at the same time restricting political and social freedoms.⁸⁵

Two decades after Indonesia's independence, Chinese Indonesians were therefore still structurally vulnerable. They still lacked a sound legal basis or even a strong social contract by which they could lay claim to 'belonging' in Indonesia. Such ongoing insecurity meant that self-preservation remained a day-to-day concern. Under the New Order this gave rise to the easy operation of patron-client partnerships, characterised in Indonesian language by the term *cukong*, which was essentially the exchange of money for security.⁸⁶ By seeking 'friends' or business partners in positions of power, Chinese Indonesians at all levels of society sought and paid for assurances for their safety and the development of their family businesses. The New Order kept in place a mutually beneficial system for members of the elite and for many Chinese Indonesians, whilst increasing their underlying vulnerability and dependence upon the elite in military and government for protection. High-level relationships such as those with Suharto's family members and senior military figures were restricted to a minority of Chinese Indonesians, but the same discourse and practices also defined relations between small shopkeepers and local military officials. At all levels of society their ethnicity meant that Chinese Indonesians required security and needed the means to purchase it.

As the economy grew and with it the profiles of many wealthy Chinese Indonesians, stereotypes about the wealth of this minority as a whole became public ‘facts’, which still remain. The most prominent of these is the belief that Chinese Indonesians, who comprise only two per cent of the population, control a very large percentage of Indonesia’s wealth. Some aggregate figures are tendentious, given that Chinese Indonesians could not own land and were excluded from many lucrative state sectors.⁸⁷ Nonetheless more accurate figures show that before May 1998 Chinese-Indonesian business did indeed own approximately 80 per cent of Indonesian private *corporate* wealth.⁸⁸ That is to say, of limited liability companies. Chinese Indonesians owned nine of the top ten business groups in Indonesia and controlled 80 per cent of assets in the top three hundred groups. Of the country’s top 15 taxpayers, 13 were ethnic Chinese — the other two were Bambang and Tommy Suharto, the President’s sons. The relationships formed between Suharto and businessmen like Liem Sioe Liong (aka Sudono Salim) head of the Salim Group of companies and Indonesia’s richest man, coupled with conspicuous displays of their wealth during these decades, fed perceptions of Chinese Indonesians as a community of the rich. There was also widespread belief about ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and elsewhere that, ‘Culturally, the Chinese had a head start in the game of capitalism.’⁸⁹

Such generalisations fail to acknowledge that, although some Chinese Indonesians are extremely wealthy business people⁹⁰ and owners of conglomerates,⁹¹ they are very few compared to the multitude of small traders and shop-owners.⁹² In New Order Indonesia a view recognising the complexities of their position did not and arguably could not prevail. Instead, as Schwarz quoted an interviewee in 1989: ‘To most Indonesians, the word ‘Chinese’ is synonymous with corruption.’⁹³ In the aftermath of the May 1998 violence, Chinese Indonesian-backed magazines like *Sinergi*⁹⁴ sought to demonstrate that this view excluded those Chinese Indonesians who laboured in the *sawah* (rice fields) around Tangerang or sought a livelihood as small-scale fishermen in Cemarajaya, West Java and the vast majority of Chinese Indonesians who operated small businesses, such as *sembako* (basic goods) stores, across the country.⁹⁵

The first signs that this mix of discrimination, ‘assimilation’, *cukong* partnerships and associated stereotypes was causing heightened anti-Chinese sentiment were seen as early as January 1974. The visit by Japanese Prime Minister, Tanaka, in January 1974 saw anti-foreign or seemingly, anti-Chinese violence in Jakarta.⁹⁶ Though the violence was nominally anti-Japanese, with Japanese cars burned, Chinese-Indonesian

property was the main focus of the violence, primarily led by students protesting against rising prices and corruption and Suharto's cronyism. The next wave of incidents occurred in 1984 following the deaths of Muslim protesters at Tanjung Priok. The deaths led to a series of bombings in Jakarta, with the first target being the Bank Central Asia owned by Liem Sioe Liong.

Evidence of the political manipulation of these sentiments, was seen a few years later in 1990. In what commentators described as 'good theatre', Suharto called a meeting of the most powerful businessmen in Indonesia — almost all Chinese Indonesians. Despite the fact that Suharto and his family then ranked among the richest in Asia, Suharto played the part of champion of the poor. He called on the conglomerates to give 25 per cent of their shares over to cooperatives. The meeting, which took place at Tapos, Suharto's private ranch in West Java, was televised across the country.⁹⁷ Another similar meeting was staged in 1995 at which the leaders of Indonesia's most wealthy companies (again, ethnic Chinese) were instructed in the meanings of the Pancasila. These signals combined to reinforce suspicions and resentments of Chinese Indonesians among many *pribumi*.

More than 25 years ago, a prominent scholar of overseas Chinese, Wang Gungwu, predicted that the failure of Chinese Indonesians to press their claims for their own *suku* or ethnic group meant that they would fill a role in society which 'is principally one of being an instrument of economic growth without either political ambition or social respectability, and will remain their role until they are totally assimilated and, therefore, no longer Chinese'.⁹⁸ However, perceptions of 'assimilation' being used as a tool for ethnic erasure, in fact greatly misinterpreted the New Order's aims for it.⁹⁹ Rather than seeking to erase Chinese-ness, to make Chinese 'Indonesians', it was intended as a constant source of negativity. Chinese Indonesians continue to occupy a special status in the economy, separate from the so-called middle class or any single class grouping in Indonesia but marked by their 'Chinese-ness'.

Not long after the 1995 meeting, a series of riots including violence against Chinese Indonesians broke out in Java. In October 1996 in the East Javanese town of Situbondo followed in West Java by Tasikmalaya in December and in Rengasdengklok in January 1997, Chinese-Indonesian property and places of worship were attacked in cases of mass violence. Although these events raised concern among religious and Chinese-Indonesian groups, at the time they were attributed to growing frustrations with the wealth gap. With the onset of the economic crisis

in late 1997 and early 1998, attacks on Chinese-Indonesian shops increased in frequency and intensity across Java. As this book will illustrate, this came at a time of immense change to the economic, political and ultimately also social condition of the Indonesian nation-state. External factors including the Asian economic crisis and also local conflicts and political trends combined to contribute to widespread frustration and intense anti-Chinese sentiment. During this period, damage to Chinese-Indonesian property including their places of worship and harm to persons intensified and reached a climax in May 1998 with violence in several of Indonesia's main cities.

NATIONALISM AND THE ROLE OF PREJUDICE

The situation of the ethnic Chinese minority in Indonesia is not unique. Indeed it can be said that the ideology of nationalism is exclusionary: it sets limits as to what or who is constituted as belonging to the 'nation'. In this process an 'outgroup' of citizens who reside within the nation state, though they fail to 'belong' to it, is often established. In his celebrated thesis on the origins of nationalism, Benedict Anderson challenges the argument that nationalism has 'its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism' by constructing an 'in-group'. Anderson may be correct in rejecting the argument that racism and, as was his specific focus, anti-Semitism, derive from nationalism. However, it can be argued that nationalism encourages the perpetuation of racist sentiment as communities seek to define their 'imagined community' as separate, limited and sovereign.¹⁰⁰ In the nation-state there is often a minority group that is easily identified due to visible, cultural or religious differences, and its 'othering' serves a functional purpose.¹⁰¹ Triandafyllidou describes it thus, 'one nation or ethnic group becomes a salient outgroup, namely a significant other, against which the nation seeks to assert itself and which in turn influences its identity'.¹⁰² This resonates with the situation of ethnic Chinese in Indonesian nationalism.

(T)he extent to which the New Order Self is premised on the active and conscious othering of the Chinese indicates how indispensable this ethnic Other is for the reproduction of the Native Self. If the Chinese were simply unwanted, this minority could have been marginalised, destroyed or simply ignored.¹⁰³

In her study of anti-Chinese violence in the late colonial period, Somers-Heidhues impels us to acknowledge the role played not only by the state

but also 'the people' in the creation of difference and hierarchy in the nation-state.¹⁰⁴ Another scholar of nationalism, Eric Hobsbawm gave a similar emphasis:

While governments are plainly engaged in conscious and deliberate ideological engineering, it would be a mistake to see these exercises as pure manipulation from above. They were, indeed, most successful when they could build on already present unofficial nationalist sentiments To the extent that such sentiments were not created but only borrowed and fostered by governments, those who did so became a kind of sorcerer's apprentice.¹⁰⁵

Likewise Fearon and Laitin argue that 'ordinary folks (not just elites) strategically construct ethnic boundaries'.¹⁰⁶ They reason that the outgroup performs a variety of functions in a modern nation-state and is particularly useful in a developing state, often coinciding with periods when the national identity is questioned. During these periods such a group can provide a common enemy or a 'lever for the transition towards a new identity'.¹⁰⁷

The theory of the middleman minority resonates with the situation of Chinese Indonesians, as this is a group who are both ethnically and economically distinct. The middleman 'acts as a buffer' between the elite and the public in commerce, and also plays a similar role in times of social hostility. The elite often use them as a 'scapegoat' in order to deflect aggression from themselves. For the masses needing to vent frustration and aggression at the state, the middleman provides a useful target without fear of retribution.¹⁰⁸ An often-used term in political and social intercourse, 'scapegoating' was described by Gordon Allport as a process whereby, 'The people felt purged, and for the time being guiltless.'¹⁰⁹ The equivalent term in Indonesian language — *kambing hitam* or literally, black goat — is likewise commonly used and often in reference to Chinese Indonesians.¹¹⁰

Under prevailing conditions the Chinese are still uncertain whether they will be made scapegoats if economic conditions or political dissension take a drastic turn for the worse.¹¹¹

It can therefore prove useful for both the elite and the masses to isolate a distinct minority group within the nation-state as a buffer. Through government policy, behaviour and constructions of national identity that exclude the minority group, ideas or myths are fostered regarding the 'alienness' of that minority, so that discrimination becomes

institutionalised. In times of political or economic frustration, this group will be targeted again and again. Referring to the hostility of anti-Semitism, P. I. Rose concluded that the scapegoating of a minority group 'offers a kind of political methadone' in times of trouble for the elite or the community as a whole.¹¹²

In his writings on violence against ethnic Chinese, Wertheim sought to compare Chinese in Southeast Asia with the Jews of Europe, drawing parallels between these two as trading classes and as persecuted minorities. This is a theme that has been returned to in more recent studies.¹¹³ Wertheim argues that tensions within the community emanated from a desire by the majority to exclude the middleman trader from a position of influence: 'their basic aim is to oust them in order to supplant them in their position of economic power'. He dismisses the issue of ethnicity as not central to this conflict.¹¹⁴ Direct comparison between Jewish and ethnic Chinese minorities is problematic for the obvious reason of Hitler's 'final solution'. Nothing comparable can be found in the history of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia. However, as Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid pointed out in their edited volume *Essential Outsiders*, the economic position occupied by Chinese Indonesians in Southeast Asia more generally, and their position as ethnic minorities, can validly be compared with that of Jews in Central Europe during the early twentieth century. As minority groups they were both targeted for violence, even if the outcomes were starkly different. The scholarly study of minorities and ethnic prejudice itself emerged from the debris of the Second World War.¹¹⁵ This comparison makes it all the more curious that Wertheim, who had lived through World War II, rejected 'ethnicity' as a source of anti-Chinese violence in favour of a purely economic explanation.

Given the parallel between Jewish and Southeast Asian Chinese communities as 'essential outsiders', an important and often avoided question is why the so-called 'Chinese problem' seems to be so much more acute in Indonesia than in other parts of Southeast Asia. Malaysia implemented affirmative action for its *bumiputra* (indigenous) following race riots in 1969, which effectively discriminated against Chinese in many sections of society.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Chinese Malaysians were still free to express their identity both as ethnic Chinese and as Malaysians, also to participate in the political as well as economic life of the nation. These were rights for which Chinese in Indonesia could only dream. Instead they were forced to adopt 'Indonesianised' names, banned from practising Chinese culture and shut out of political life.

The obligation to change names from a Chinese to a *pribumi* one, restrictions on the practice of religion and use of the Chinese language, signalled to the wider Indonesian community that this 'identity' was somehow threatening, to the extent that it needed to be erased.

Comparison of the Indonesian situation with that in Thailand and the Philippines highlights the issue of religious difference. Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia mostly adhere to the minority religions, Christianity, Buddhism and Confucianism, thereby making their acceptance by the majority arguably more difficult than in Buddhist Thailand and the Catholic Philippines. Malaysia, however, as an Islamic state, challenges any simple analysis. Malaysia has a much larger ethnic Chinese community — 26 per cent of the total population¹¹⁷ compared with Indonesia's two per cent, but as the 1969 riots in Kuala Lumpur demonstrated, this hardly explains why racism would be less virulent. It may be significant that in colonial times Malaysian towns had been predominantly Chinese and lacked a history of racial strife. When strife did occur in 1969, the government acted promptly with the New Economic Policy to defuse economic rivalry.

Anti-Chinese Violence as Ethnic Violence

One can accept the importance of economic competition as a factor in anti-Chinese sentiment in Indonesia, without necessarily dismissing all else as 'rationalisations'.¹¹⁸

Scholars of Indonesia's ethnic Chinese minority have long understood that violence is the outcome of only a very small fraction of the meetings between the Chinese-Indonesian minority and the majority indigenous (*pribumi*) population. Studies of anti-Chinese violence by Jamie Mackie,¹¹⁹ Charles Coppel and Ariel Heryanto¹²⁰ have greatly influenced the approach undertaken here of more recent violence. Like Mackie's approach to anti-Chinese violence between 1959 and 1968, each incident is approached on a case-by-case basis. This allows close analysis of the events and their agents. Scholarship by W.F. Wertheim, The Siau-w Giap, Mary Somers Heidhues and Takashi Shiraishi¹²¹ has provided theoretical models for this study to build on. These scholars use theories of economic competition and political manipulation to understand incidents of violence against Chinese Indonesians.

The Siau-w Giap and, as already mentioned, Wertheim argued that economic competition and particularly the middleman role of ethnic

Chinese in Indonesia was the single causal factor of anti-Chinese violence. Wertheim contended that economic factors dominate relations between Chinese Indonesians and the majority population, with the result that anti-Chinese violence occurs predominantly during periods of economic crisis or transition. In her study of violence against Chinese Indonesians and anti-Sinicism in the period of the 1940s to 1960s, Somers-Heidhues also argues for the centrality of economic exploitation or jealousy and economic competition as a popular explanation of the violence. However, she also insists that this is not the sole determinant: 'we would be wrong to assign it alone the responsibility for anti-Sinicism'.¹²² She observes that the methods employed within Indonesian society to stir up anti-Chinese sentiment were more varied and included religion, tribalism and nationalism. Writing about anti-Chinese violence during the period of Dutch rule in the 1910s, Shiraishi offers an explanation that resonates with more contemporary examples. He contends that the Netherlands Indies government used elite control and political manipulation of social sentiment to promote anti-Sinicism and to create racialised divisions in order to undermine the emerging nationalist movement.

The role of prejudice and ethnicity as a cause of anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia has been under-represented in the literature thus far.

(t)he answer to anti-Sinicism is, however, not so simple as the adjustment of the sum of the political, economic and cultural antecedents as outlined above. All prejudice, including anti-Sinicism, contains a substantial measure of the irrational. In the end, nothing which the Chinese themselves do can fully account for the feeling against them; nothing they can do can fully counteract that sentiment.¹²³

Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia have experienced violence at different times and places and under various political regimes, often coinciding with changes in the wider political and social environment. Each event built upon the one before it, creating a history, memory and 'place' for anti-Chinese sentiment and violence. Under the New Order regime the government appropriated these memories and histories of anti-Chinese sentiment, evoking them for its own aims, and anti-Chinese violence was made justifiable and 'normal'.

The New Order's policies for solving the 'Chinese Problem' meant that by the early 1990s, conceptualisations of the causes of violence against Chinese Indonesians emphasised economic and class-related

explanations. The 1995 Tapos meeting between President Suharto and the heads of Chinese-Indonesian conglomerates and other high profile businessmen contributed to the condition whereby discussion of the 'wealth gap' was distinctly racialised by the time the first incident of violence studied here took place at Situbondo in October 1996. A study of violence against Chinese Indonesians during the late New Order and early *reformasi* period needs to consider that economic resentments alone cannot explain its frequency and intensity. Broader questions about prejudice, the role of minority groups and the utility of violence in the modern nation-state must also be considered. As Daniel Chirot put it, 'Something more was required' than simply economic specialisation and associated prejudice.¹²⁴

These lines of investigation are not always easy to balance. Moreover, approaches to the study of Chinese Indonesians need to recognise the incongruities with which they live. On the one hand, displays of wealth have seemingly provoked resentments and violence from fellow Indonesians; on the other hand they have been encouraged by successive governments in New Order and post-New Order Indonesia to assist in development of the nation. Many Chinese Indonesians see the benefits of assimilation and indeed regard themselves as assimilated: a study in the early 1970s found that 81 per cent of ethnic Chinese households in Jakarta spoke Indonesian.¹²⁵ Yet they are still treated differently under the law and ethnicity continues to be a fissure in the construct of the Indonesian 'nation'. Theirs is a difficult position to negotiate, between wanting to blend in with the majority and participate in its development and be Indonesian, and the desire to claim their heritage and rights as Chinese Indonesians in a multi-ethnic nation.¹²⁶

To promote a thesis that Chinese Indonesians are targeted for violence solely because of their economic role, without regard to their political and legal situation, would be misguided. So too would analysis that focused only on the role of the state as an agent of violence, viewing it simply as a part of a larger conspiracy theory. Chinese Indonesians themselves are aware of the complexities of any event involving violence against them from the inaction of the security agents and the role of elite power struggles, to the participation of their neighbours in the violence. How then should we approach anti-Chinese violence? Should we study Chinese Indonesians according to class, thereby comparing them to the non-Chinese middle class and omitting mention of those Chinese Indonesians who are not in the same economic realm; or according to

ethnicity, with all the dangers this entails such as searching for commonalities that may not exist?

In the late 1990s Benedict Anderson wrote about the declining sense of security in Indonesia due to the increased violence and crime since the fall of Suharto. In the context of the debate between essentialising and universalising the experience of Chinese Indonesians, we are prompted to ponder the irony of his statement: 'These middle classes are quite aware of what has happened here and there to the Chinese, and how 'structurally Chinese' they have themselves become.'¹²⁷ Scholarly discussion and debate during the late 1980s and early 1990s about the rise of 'the middle classes' in Indonesia anticipated a flood of vocal, educated Indonesians who in time would bring about a democratic state.¹²⁸ Yet, by Anderson's argument, rather than the middle classes gaining power and confidence with a change in regime and transition to democracy in Indonesia in the late 1990s and early years of the twenty-first century, they were rendered less secure, less prosperous and therefore, more 'structurally Chinese'. We can compare this to Heryanto's prediction of a drift towards opening a space in Indonesian public 'culture' for Chinese-ness, and argue that it has been manifested in the same insecurities and threats of violence that this minority have long experienced as a part of their 'culture' of everyday life.¹²⁹

Anderson identifies the priority accorded by Chinese Indonesians to security but his claim that rising criminality and declining security is making members of the middle class 'structurally Chinese' erases the ethnic specificity of incidents of violence against Chinese Indonesians, reducing it to a 'structural' or class phenomenon. In fact, there is a clear distinction. No matter how 'structurally' Chinese the non-Chinese members of Indonesia's middle classes become, they will still be Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, Balinese and so on and will be treated accordingly under the laws of the state and within the collective imagination of the nation. Unlike Anderson's presumably once secure non-Chinese middle classes,¹³⁰ many Chinese Indonesians, although certainly shocked when violence hit in May 1998, were perhaps less than surprised when it came amidst economic decline and popular *reformasi*. Chinese Indonesians knew their security always came at a price. The economic success of Chinese Indonesians has always been dependent on the goodwill of those in power.¹³¹ Their ethnicity means that Chinese Indonesians are always vulnerable. The study of anti-Chinese violence therefore needs to examine the agency of those who carry it out and look for responsibility at all levels, including among the elite.

Agency and Responsibility

For a long time the most common approach to the study of ethnic violence was to look to theories of mass violence. The focus was on frustration leading to aggression, with a linear progression from prejudice to precipitating incident. Such analyses implied a degree of 'inevitability', as though ethnic violence is a 'natural' event, like a chemical experiment in which a given blend of ingredients produces an explosive reaction. Wertheim's writings fitted this mould: economic competition generates underlying tension. Wieviorka,¹³² Horowitz and Brass,¹³³ however, take issue with the theory that accumulated tensions are 'ignited by a spark' and flare into violence. They provide frameworks for more complex understandings of mass violence against a particular ethnic group, encouraging deeper investigation of the causes and motives of its agents.

Arguments that invoke exploitation and economic competition as causes of racist hostility and violence can serve to justify it and exculpate even the instigators. Public violence thereby becomes an understandable response to tough conditions. In *Riots and Pogroms*, Paul Brass encourages scholars to recognise 'intentionality' in order to understand the 'endemic' nature of ethnic violence in certain places and also to acknowledge who controls representations of the violence. Localised hostilities cannot transform into greater violent activity such as large ethnic riots without some structures being in place. Paul Brass describes 'institutionalised riot systems', in which actors — 'riot specialists', 'riot engineers' and 'fire tenders' — exist for the sole purpose of inciting or preventing violence.¹³⁴

Traditional sequences of violence as a continuum from social antagonism to precipitating incident to racist violence are therefore simplistic. The development of mass violence can be better seen as having four parts: the creation of prejudices, politicisation of those differences, development of sites where it is politically advantageous to allow the proliferation of 'riot specialists' and the transformation of the environment in which these events take place into a social problem.¹³⁵ Ethnic violence is the result of concentrated efforts on the part of the state and certain in-groups to create a hostile environment for minority groups, so that ethnic antagonism flourishes. It then falls to the 'specialists' to wait for the time when conditions for a full-scale attack are right. The extent to which racist violence evolves and the number of victims it claims therefore depends largely on the activity or inactivity of the police and security agents. In cases of ethnic violence, the range of actions taken by state security agents runs from deliberate instigation (provoking,

supplying rioters), to deliberate inaction (standing by while rioters loot and burn), to using overwhelming force to bring the violence to an end. Agency and responsibility is critical in causing and maintaining the conditions for peace and for violence, both on the part of the state and society:

(T)he modern nation state, whose everyday operations — of self definition, of preserving its order and maintaining or enlarging its territory, of defining and creating its order and authority — generate violent conflicts. But the state does not operate independently of its citizens and subjects, who are themselves implicated in these conflict-generating processes through their upbringing, education, socialisation, reading of newspapers, submissions to media representations and misrepresentations of reality ¹³⁶

Thus the presence of a crowd of people on a beach on a hot, idle Sunday afternoon is not enough to trigger violence even if other predisposing conditions are in place.¹³⁷ The presence of a third party acting as fire tender or fire dowsers is crucial. Just as the selection of a victim is seldom random, the choice of time and place for mass violence is arguably well-planned as well.

Assessing the Limits to Violence

(I)f violence and hardened ethnic boundaries serve elite but not popular interests, then what explains popular ethnic antipathies (Fearon and Laitin).¹³⁸

It is instructive to see anti-Chinese violence as utilitarian, that is, 'racist violence is seen as a means to a certain ends'.¹³⁹ Wieviorka in *Arena of Racism* recognises that violence may emerge as a result of displaced and direct frustration and as a consequence of a social or political crisis, particularly when a society enters a period of transition. Like the studies of anti-Chinese violence by Mackie and Coppel, he supports an approach that is multi-faceted on the basis that each case is unique and therefore requires unique explanation.

Nevertheless, no matter how minor and fragmented its form, the violence is 'never totally independent of the political context in which it arises'.¹⁴⁰ This relationship with the political context exists on three levels. The first — and most distantly related to the state — is where violence is conditioned and informed by the political system but is still essentially a localised event. At the second level, the violence itself

becomes political when it is taken over by organised forces that place it at the centre of their directly political activities. The third level is that most closely related to the state: racist violence becomes institutionalised in the state and constitutes a central principle of its functioning. This scale of racist violence categorises events ranging from 'quasi-isolated violence' to state-controlled racist violence.

Concluding that all racist violence is to some degree political and that 'racist violence never arises in a social vacuum',¹⁴¹ Wieviorka makes a salient observation regarding the intentions for these acts. Unlike Horowitz's theoretically constrictive 'deadly ethnic riot',¹⁴² he makes a distinction between violence based on discrimination and that based on exclusion, labelling the former 'limited' and the latter 'unlimited' racist violence. Like Heryanto's argument that it is not the intention to wipe out Chinese-ness, but rather to keep it constantly 'under erasure' in Indonesia,¹⁴³ Wieviorka understands the aim of discrimination as being to construct a minority group as inferior. In such a case violence must be limited because it cannot destroy the group altogether without also destroying the foundations of the state's domination.

The Study of Violence in Indonesia

'Why do we get different narratives about particular events at different times and in different places?'¹⁴⁴

In recent years a new wave of academic interest has emerged in the study, not only of anti-Chinese violence but also of violence in Indonesia more generally, particularly since the end of the New Order. This indicates not only a rise in the frequency of violence in Indonesia, but also a new way of looking at it. Instead of asking simply 'What happened?' and 'Why?', researchers of ethnic violence are also asking, 'Who is writing this history?', 'What does it tell us about this society?', also 'How do we deal with the suffering?' and even 'Can we ever find the truth about an event of mass violence?'¹⁴⁵ These questions and others like them define a brief for a challenging investigation that goes to the heart of some fundamental issues in history writing and fact finding. For example, the use of certain discourses by the state in relation to incidents of anti-Chinese and other forms of violence in Indonesia 'mark out' areas of public life where violence is legitimated or, at the very least, demonstrate support for it through inaction. Terms like *preman* (thug), *pihak tertentu* (third party) and *provokator* (provocateur) give impunity to those who carry out these

events. Led by the state, this discourse constitutes a part of what many scholars explain as the rhetoric of institutionalised state violence in Indonesia.¹⁴⁶ Recent work on violence in Indonesia investigates ideas of social order and hierarchies and ‘regimes of truth’ and locates the role of the nation-state, the individual and the place of the victims with respect to the violence.

It is no coincidence that such scholarship has emerged at the same time as new sources of ‘truth’ after the fall of the authoritarian Suharto regime. There are new challenges to the state’s monopoly of ‘truth’ about events including violence, some of which was perpetrated by the state itself. This multiplication of often conflicting voices, perspectives and ‘regimes of truth’ has forced researchers to think more deeply about the motives and impetus behind such representations.¹⁴⁷ Increasing study of ‘alternative histories’ has opened up new areas of critical study and reflection on the history of violent events.¹⁴⁸ Recent official and unofficial processes of ‘truth-seeking’ and in some cases ‘justice-seeking’ for mass atrocities have taken place in many countries. Official attempts at ‘transitional justice’, that is, some form of justice for nations emerging from a period of instability, have included, most prominently, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, and similar processes in Chile, Rwanda, and other countries.¹⁴⁹ Unofficial histories of violent events, including those presented in reports assembled by civil society organisations and independent domestic and international media reports, provide the researcher with more varied representations.

In addition to television and radio, Internet technology means that individuals now have the power to be heard across the globe, instantly and uncensored. The real-time availability of material has consequences for both the researcher and the victims, as Laura Lochore, Ien Ang and Elaine Tay¹⁵⁰ have discussed in the case of violence against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. On the one hand, persecuted groups and individuals can speak to the world without censorship; on the other, their suffering can be exploited and misappropriated. This raises important questions about authenticity of the voice or images presented on the web, and challenges the researcher to be more rigorous in handling these sources. At the same time, it is pertinent to examine the way these representations can elicit powerful responses in those who read or view them.

Gaping holes still remain in the set of voices heard about violence in Indonesia but since the late 1990s the variety of ‘truths’ has been greatly widened, as also critiques of these new voices. The presence of large Western organisations and funding agencies in Indonesia with an

interest in the promotion of democracy, democratic values and human rights has also meant that there is a ready supply of funds to support groups within the country who work with victims of violence and campaign for human rights.¹⁵¹ These groups sometimes send their message out to an international constituency.

This multiplication of sources means that the cases of anti-Chinese violence under investigation here — unlike earlier studies by Wertheim, Mackie, and Shiraishi — involve the voices of at least some of those touched by the violence, including its victims. It is less easy to attempt a causal explanation or master narrative of these events without concern for the emotion that surely colours it and without questioning the motive behind the various representations. Analysts of recent violence against Chinese Indonesians have approached their subjects from a more 'global' perspective of violence against minority groups and ethnic violence within the context of an authoritarian state.¹⁵² Instead of restricting the analysis to the specific Indonesian context, these approaches attempt to draw out more 'universal' understandings of why people resort to violence against a particular group, or why violence is represented in a certain way.

During Guided Democracy and especially under the New Order, explanations could be located within the authoritarian system that sponsored violence as a problem-solving method. Although the authoritarian regime and its leader are gone and the structures that maintained his power are weakened, the violence has not dissipated. Violent conflict has actually become more frequent and more varied. It can no longer be explained simply in terms of state terrorism orchestrated by 'third party agents'. There is increasing recognition of the plurality of truths. State truths, 'media reality' and the 'factual' and 'moral' truths told by human rights organisations are all in tension.

'Indonesia is a violent country'.¹⁵³ The upsurge in research and writing about violence in Indonesia since the end of the New Order has reflected its prevalence during and after this period, but it is also due to new academic interest.¹⁵⁴ As Henk Schulte Nordholt argues, violence in Indonesia has a genealogy that stretches back to the colonial state and regimes in between.¹⁵⁵ Anti-Chinese violence therefore rarely occurs in isolation. For this reason it is not incongruous that cases described below as 'anti-Chinese violence' occurred within a context of more widespread violence against other groups. For example, the violence in Jakarta in May 1998 included attacks on Chinese-Indonesian property and the rapes of Chinese-Indonesian women, but it also led to the deaths of some

one thousand urban poor. The violence in Java in 1996–97 took place at the same time as fierce and bloody clashes in West Kalimantan between Dayaks and Madurese that claimed hundreds of lives.

A complex layering of sentiments motivates an act of violence against a Chinese Indonesian: jealousies, misdirected frustrations and racialised prejudice. Prejudice is not enough on its own to bring about violence. Neither is it the intention to argue that Indonesia has a culture of violence, of which anti-Chinese violence is one form. On the contrary, attempts are made to follow Mary Steedly's advice:

(t)he alternative to essentialising or to culturalising violence is not to disregard it but rather to localise it. By this I mean exploring the full particularity of its multifarious occasions: how it is produced in certain circumstances; how it is deployed, represented, limited, imagined, ignored, or instigated; how it is identified, disciplined, interrogated, and, of course, punished.¹⁵⁶

Some acts of violence, which took place in the final years of the New Order, were anomalous to the common forms of 'anti-Chinese' violence experienced under the regime. The rapes of Chinese-Indonesian and other women and the systematic nature of the destruction of property were without precedent. The violence against Chinese Indonesians continued after May 1998, but in its more 'normal' form of attacks on property. This brief period of concentrated anti-Chinese violence, which took place in different places across Indonesia and included the massive violence in May 1998, encapsulates the 'history' of anti-Chinese violence.

A study of the events in this period exposes the range of motives, agents and contexts within this violence took place. From this we are able to perceive the persistence of particular elements in the violence across time and place. This study also aims to demonstrate the *differences* that exist between individual incidents of violence against Chinese Indonesians and argues that 'anti-Chinese violence' is not a crystallised phenomenon. It suggests that there is no single form or 'type' of violence in Indonesia which can be labelled 'anti-Chinese violence'. Each case examined here reveals a different set of environmental factors, levels of organisation and state-led involvement.¹⁵⁷

The main periods of anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia have coincided with times of change and shifts in power within the nation-state. These power struggles have been manifest at both national and local levels. As an ethnic minority around whom there exists a 'memory' of violence and impunity for its perpetrators, the ground had long been

set for the violence against Chinese Indonesians in the midst of yet another elite power struggle in May 1998. As we shall see, the fact that violence continued after the change in regime highlights the strength of these habitual sentiments that are present not only within political but also social structures.

Through the history of the Indonesian nation, the issues of identity and discrimination against Indonesians of Chinese descent created a context for hostility and prejudice towards this minority. Their status in the economy has given them a role in the journey towards development but also, as a consequence of discriminatory laws and government actions, put them at risk in times of economic and political stress. This has created a cycle whereby Chinese Indonesians must buy security from those in power in order to continue in their economic roles. This has opened them to the risk of manipulation by those who can easily incite racialised sentiments. Their history as 'outsiders', too vulnerable and defenceless to confront elites or the masses, means that their future remains dependent on the goodwill and self-interest of those who hold power.

2

Spreading Discontent

The history of recent anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia coincides with the beginning of a period of political transformation. On 27 July 1996 in an assault that was to trigger unstoppable momentum for political reform, government thugs invaded the headquarters of the Indonesian Democracy Party (PDI) in downtown Jakarta. Party members had occupied the building as a protest against the government-orchestrated ousting of Megawati Sukarnoputri (daughter of former President Sukarno) as PDI leader at a congress in Medan in June. Megawati and PDI had been gaining popular support and were perceived as a threat to the ruling Golkar party in the approaching May 1997 elections. In response, the government had declared Megawati's appointment invalid and set up a new congress to elect PDI's leader, at which the government's preferred candidate Suryadi was elected. Megawati and her supporters boycotted the congress, and it was at this point that they took over the party's headquarters in Central Jakarta. During the attack an unknown number of PDI supporters were killed, others were arrested and many remain missing. There ensued two days of rioting across Jakarta. As the government wrestled to regain control they cast around for someone to blame for the attack on PDI headquarters. The focus settled upon a small socialist student group, the People's Democratic Party (*Partai Rakyat Indonesia*, PRD). The young members of the party were arrested, tried in sham trials and given lengthy sentences. From fear of government reprisals, the opposition movement was largely forced underground.

The government's repression of opposition followed the bannings of the news magazines *Tempo*, *DeTik* and *Editor* in mid-1994 and the end of its programme of openness (*keterbukaan*). At this point Suharto had, it seemed, effectively dealt with the growing threat of free speech and that which Megawati posed to his power and success in the 1997

elections. In the coming months he would seek to destabilise or co-opt other such potential rivals. Nevertheless, many Indonesians saw through the government's fabrications and rhetoric. Indonesia's political and social landscape began to alter. The May 1997 parliamentary election period was marked by violence between political parties and a growing dissent not only amongst supporters of Megawati but also sections of the Islamic party PPP and other supporters of democracy. Indonesians were becoming more willing to challenge the political and also the moral structures upon which the New Order had built its rule and to call for reforms (*reformasi*).

In mid-1996 at the time of the violence at PDI headquarters, the national economy was still booming.¹ Growth in all sectors of the economy led by manufacturing saw GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth at around eight per cent, which economists described as 'robust'. Inflation was low, employment was growing, particularly in the construction industry, and real wages were gradually rising. Nonetheless, the New Order's development programme, the cornerstone of its legitimacy, was beginning to be questioned.² The growing personal wealth of President Suharto, his family and his business associates, highlighted by the controversy surrounding Tommy Suharto's control of the 'national car project' at this time, was being seen by the country at large less as a measure of national well-being and more as a symbol of the widening gap between rich and poor. Moreover, this gap was increasingly seen in terms of ethnic difference. Suharto had continued to divert attention from his personal wealth to bolster social perceptions of Chinese Indonesians, as wealthy and corrupt. At the end of 1995 he issued Presidential Decision (Keppres) No.90 stipulating that corporations (including foreign ones) must set aside two per cent of net profit over Rp100 million (about US\$42,800) to help families dependent on welfare.³ Nevertheless, most Indonesians perceived that ethnic Chinese businessmen counted among Suharto's closest cronies. Across the country, the success of Chinese-Indonesian business in leading the growth and development of local economies was similarly perceived to be due to their collusion with corrupt local authorities.

During the early 1990s Chinese Indonesians in towns and cities across the country invested in new facilities such as shopping centres, leisure complexes and churches to cater to their needs and those of the expanding middle classes. To most Indonesians who remained poor and unable to climb into the middle class, these developments drew envy and resentment. Ordinary Indonesians felt themselves to be victims

of a tightening political regime and widening social divide. Chinese Indonesians were identified as agents of the system responsible for their suffering.

For many poor people, excluded from the benefits of the national development programme, a sense of empowerment and identity increasingly came from their religious commitment to Islam. The defence of Islam from interference and denigration, and demonstrations of the importance of Islam, became heightened during this time. At the elite level this translated into friction between the two largest Muslim organisations Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and also ICMI (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia*, Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals) as they jockeyed for Suharto's favour and a political advantage for their organisation in an election year. Aware of the increasing political importance of Islam Suharto had backed the establishment of ICMI in 1990. However, by late 1996 his support was waning. He felt that its leaders were becoming too prominent and outspoken. Meanwhile, the government's campaign to marginalise Abdurrahman Wahid took an interesting turn. As Suharto had shown through his treatment of the PDI, he was determined to suppress all challengers and dissenters and secure another landslide victory for the government party, Golkar, in the coming election, and so he could not ignore the growing influence of Islam.

Violent Dissent

Within the space of five months in late 1996 and early 1997 mass violence took place in the Javanese towns of Situbondo, Tasikmalaya and Rengasdengklok with Chinese Indonesians the primary target. Though each of these incidents has a unique story in time and place, they were also part of a wider sequence of violence in Indonesia. Bloody violence between Dayaks and Madurese in Sanggau Ledo in West Kalimantan continued from December 1996 until March 1997, claiming an estimated five hundred lives and displacing tens of thousands of Madurese. The violence in Java and West Kalimantan could be interpreted as popular resistance during a period of rising political aspirations. However, in Java it also exposed a growing confidence among many Muslims to challenge the Pancasila doctrine of religious and racial harmony, which restricted the role of Islam in the state. The failure of the police and military to stop this violence demonstrated an unexpected weakness of the authoritarian regime. In the past violent suppression of uprisings

and demonstrations, including those by Islamic groups, had been well within the capabilities of these forces, as demonstrated in 1984 when the military violently suppressed Muslims protesting in Tanjung Priok.

The violent incidents in Situbondo, Rengasdengklok and Tasikmalaya gripped the nation and its leaders and led to increased anxiety within the entire Chinese-Indonesian community. These incidents challenged understandings of what constituted 'anti-Chinese violence' or, more particularly, the set of circumstances under which such violence was acceptable. The responses to and appropriation of this violence reveal a great deal about the functionality or uses of anti-Chinese violence in the late New Order period. The elite national discourse labelled the violence as part of a conspiracy to destabilise the nation, while rejecting the suggestion that it was religious or ethnic conflict. Yet in each case, Christians and Chinese Indonesians were among the main targets sought out for attack. In Situbondo and Tasikmalaya this response was given even though the actual 'trigger' for the violence had nothing to do with Christians or ethnic Chinese. The common factor was the perceived denigration or abuse of Islam. The violence in Rengasdengklok was particularly revealing due to indications that this was, in some part, a 'copycat' incident. There was evidence of hostility and jealousy towards 'rich' Chinese Indonesians. People felt threatened by Christian religious expansion, and held prejudices based on entrenched discrimination. An investigation of these three separate violent incidents must reflect the unique set of circumstances and events that contributed to them. As Siegel points out, 'It would be precipitous ... to see all anti-Chinese sentiment as having the same source.'⁴ However, close analysis of the Situbondo and Rengasdengklok cases shows that, despite different local sources, public attitudes and perceptions about the targets of the violence were common.

Two days before Situbondo erupted into violence, President Suharto had addressed a meeting of cabinet ministers, senior generals and political faithful on the threats to Indonesia's national unity. His focus was the potential of the growing social and economic disparity to create feelings of dissatisfaction. He said,

The social and economic gap that exists in the community can be manipulated by those who want to destabilise the principles of nation and state and use the masses to achieve their goals. They will take advantage of unrest in workers groups, farmers and urban poor communities.⁵

Rather than using his speech to call for calm and acting to limit the potential for violence, the President referred to unnamed instigators. He set up decoys and constructed 'suspicious parties' motivated to destroy the nation-state, as though anticipating the trouble to come. The spectre of the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI) remained a potent tool of the New Order, even 30 years after the communist purges. The rhetoric presented by Suharto in this address just days before the Situbondo violence was maintained through the disturbances of the next five months and beyond. Many Indonesians were no longer prepared to accept such rhetoric, which did nothing practical to address their hardships. The violence in Situbondo, Tasikmalaya and Rengasdengklok indicated that the New Order was losing control of its tools of institutionalised and politicised violence. In the past the New Order had mobilised resentment and hostility felt by many *pribumi* towards ethnic Chinese as such 'tool'. Meanwhile, it maintained a careful balance between hostility and violence. Ethnic Chinese were only useful as long as they remained in Indonesia. As the committee formed to review the 'Chinese Problem' had advised in 1967, driving them out would not only hurt the national development programme but also leave the regime without its convenient 'other'.⁶ The violence in Java in 1996–97 demonstrated that this balance was no longer under the New Order's control.

SITUBONDO, 10 OCTOBER 1996: RELIGION, RACE OR POLITICAL POWER STRUGGLE?

(T)housands of young people moved very fast ... asking others to join them in their rampage Then there were some people who shouted that Saleh, who had insulted the Kiai and Islam, was being taken to safety by church workers in a nearby church. I could not believe it then. How could Saleh be taken to a church? Saleh was a Muslim who had gone astray. What had he got to do with the church? (Marzuki, Situbondo shopkeeper).⁷

The people had no faith in the court, the symbol of the state and when the rumour hit, it was easy to trigger violence from a crowd like this (Hotman Siahaan).⁸

On 10 October 1996 mass violence broke out in and around the town of Situbondo, East Java, after a local court found a young Muslim man, Saleh, guilty of blasphemy against Islam. The majority of those involved

in the violence were Muslim and members of the NU, the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia, with a particularly strong presence through the Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in East Java. Situbondo is one such stronghold, home to numerous *pesantren* and known as a *santri* or pious and devout Muslim town. Primary targets for the violence included the courthouse, churches and Christian schools. At first glance this appeared to be violence based on religious antipathies, even though the triggering event — the trial and sentencing of a Muslim — had no relation to Christians or inter-faith issues.

After 10 October, religious, political and military groups vehemently denied that the event had been anti-Christian violence. Adopting New Order parlance, they attributed responsibility to an unknown 'third party'. By deliberately ruling out religious conflict — which the burning of churches must have indicated at some level — the community was able to avoid confronting existing anti-Christian and anti-Chinese sentiments. Efforts by community leaders and public intellectuals to locate the source of public antipathy by asking questions about the social gap, and about corruption in local government and military were hastily suffocated by their own organisations and by the government. Instead the Situbondo incident became highly politicised, particularly among Islamic organisations and elements of the military. In place of efforts to understand and reconcile, conspiracy theories thrived.

Saleh's Trial

Friends and family described Saleh, 28, as a quiet, shy and devout Muslim who worked as an attendant at Nurul Islam mosque in nearby Kapongan.⁹ It came as a shock when in April 1996 a local *kiai* or Islamic teacher, Zaini, also head of the *pesantren* Nurul Hikam at Kesambi Rampak, Kapongan reported Saleh to the Kapongan branch of NU representatives on charges of blasphemy. The *kiai* charged that at study sessions at his home, Saleh had repeatedly insulted a deceased local religious leader, Kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin, by claiming that he was a mystic or Sufi who had died in an imperfect manner or *takacer*.¹⁰ It was alleged that on one of the occasions at his home, Kiai Zaini had asked Saleh to write down what he had said and to sign it. Armed with this evidence, Zaini approached the local NU branch with his charges against Saleh. After preliminary investigations, the Board of the NU Situbondo branch decided not to pursue the matter further.¹¹ They cited troubling flaws in the alleged confession. The branch President, Kiai Ahmad

Sofyan, cautioned, 'A small problem does not need to be made into a large one.'¹² Not until Zaini, frustrated by this inaction, demanded an investigation was the case taken up by police. By this time, he had already made numerous photocopies of 'Saleh's letter' and distributed them among the local community,¹³ causing widespread anger. By the time police arrested Saleh in May 1996 and charged him with inciting hatred and blasphemy, it was very much for his own protection. In its report released after the events of 10 October 1996, the Institute for Inter-faith Dialogue in Indonesia (Interfidei) fact-finding team described Saleh as not smart enough or confident enough to say the things of which he was accused.¹⁴

Saleh's trial began on 12 September 1996 at the Situbondo courthouse. Large crowds of spectators attended the five sessions, each of which was marred by violence. It was reported that people had come from across Java to attend the hearings.¹⁵ At earlier sessions Saleh had been grabbed and beaten by the crowd, whilst the police offered him no protection. The prosecutor's office was also attacked and bottles thrown at the courthouse and at Saleh, but the police took no disciplinary action. The behaviour of the crowd outside the courthouse on 4 October was particularly violent. It was only due to the intervention by Ning Nisa, daughter of the late Kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin (whom it was alleged Saleh had defamed), that wide scale violence was averted. She told the crowd that her family had no ill feeling towards Saleh and asked them to go home.¹⁶

Sentencing Saleh: Violence in Situbondo

I am surprised. Saleh is a person of Islam, but it was a church that was destroyed. What is the connection between Saleh and the church? Surely what should have been destroyed is not a church, but Saleh's house (Pangdam [Regional Commander] Major General Imam Utomo).¹⁷

On 10 October the fifth and final session of Saleh's trial, at which he was to be sentenced, it was estimated that between one and four thousand people had assembled outside the courthouse from early in the morning. They shouted slogans including 'God is Great, kill Saleh.'¹⁸ The security forces of between one and two hundred police reinforced by troops from the local Military Area Command (Kodam) were grossly outnumbered and unprepared, despite the local authorities having predicted trouble. Earlier, the court had approached Kholil As'ad, the

son of the late Kiai As'ad, himself a popular local *kiai*, to assist police to control the people at the courthouse, as his sister had done at the previous session. Kholil was committed to another engagement in Madura and suggested that the court postpone the session until after his return. The court declined to do so.¹⁹

Around 10 a.m. the prosecution asked the court to give Saleh the maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment. The crowds, nevertheless, considered the sentence too short. Anticipating trouble, police tried to move the crowds on. In the mid-morning heat, disappointed with the term of Saleh's punishment and reacting to the allegedly harsh actions of the authorities, members of the crowd threw objects at security personnel, whom they outnumbered by more than ten to one. Meanwhile Saleh had been taken away undetected. The crowd set fire to the courthouse, using petrol from a nearby service station. Witnesses testified that a call had sounded from the crowd that Saleh was hiding in the Mount Zion Bethel Church, almost immediately opposite the courthouse. By 11 a.m. the church was in flames. Christian groups reported that blasphemous graffiti, which they believed indicated involvement by NU members, was painted on nearby walls. The crowd then attacked other churches and Christian schools, a Buddhist temple, Chinese-Indonesian shops, and government offices.²⁰ Five people died when they were trapped inside the Surabaya Pentecostal Church on Jalan Basuki Rachmat and in the house next door. The victims were the 70-year-old pastor, his wife, daughter, niece and housekeeper.

In the early afternoon the violence spread to the towns of Asem Bagus, Besuki, Panarukan, Banyu Putih and Wonojo located up to 30 kilometres from Situbondo. In each village, churches were set alight. According to a chronology of events compiled by the Indonesian Christian Communication Forum (*Forum Komunikasi Kristen Surabaya, FKKS*), the crowds were transported between locations by trucks, motorcycles and pick-ups. Other investigators found that some men carried large petrol cans, whilst others shouted orders and distributed it. Meanwhile, the security forces were ineffective. One Christian group pointed out that the Pentecostal Church of West Indonesia on Jalan Sudirman, situated next door to a police station, was also looted and damaged.²¹

In the early evening the violence was brought under control by army battalions from the towns of Bondowoso, Jember, Probolinggo and Malang, together with local military and police. The immense damage included destruction of the Situbondo courthouse, 24 churches, one

Buddhist temple, six Christian and Catholic schools, an orphanage, numerous vehicles and many shops. Five people were dead and many more were wounded.²²

Searching for the Culprits

I know the characteristics of Muslims in the area (where the attack occurred). They love unity. They are good people. So, if they become violent it must be because they were provoked (Army Chief of Staff, General R. Hartono).²³

The response of political, military and religious leaders to the violence in Situbondo on 10 October was uniformly one of extreme shock. Christian and Muslim leaders alike spoke of the previously harmonious relations between their two religious communities in Situbondo.²⁴ The Bishop of Malang commented: 'There has never been a problem between religious communities. So we were all very shocked ... it is very strange.'²⁵

Religious leaders, together with the political parties and the military, overwhelmingly opposed the claim that this violence was a religious conflict. In a demonstration of solidarity, leaders of Muslim, Catholic, Protestant and Hindu organisations issued a joint statement saying, 'We appeal to the government and the public for restraint (and) ... we hope religious and community leaders will work hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder to foster peaceful co-existence between religious communities.'²⁶ They then rushed to present alternative explanations for the violence, including the accusation that a 'third party' or provocateurs were responsible. They argued that these parties had manipulated the people's dissatisfaction and frustration about Saleh's punishment, turning it towards latent anti-Christian and anti-Chinese sentiments. Head of the Council of Indonesian Muslim religious teachers and leaders (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, MUI), Hasan Basri, called it, 'a splinter movement'.²⁷ The same sentiment also came from Christian leaders, including the Secretary General of the Union of Churches (*Persatuan Gereja Indonesia*, PGI), JM Pattisana, who denied that the violence was a 'conflict between Muslims and Christians, rather it was an event exploited by certain sides'.²⁸ In its report on the violence, the National Commission for Human Rights (*Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia*, Komnas HAM) also supported the popular belief that a group of 'irresponsible persons' engineered the violence. The Secretary of Komnas HAM, Baharuddin Lopa, added,

There is a tendency of trying to divide and incite people in the community through deceitful issues. It's quite evident in the issues, which have been occurring lately. Apparently there are still people in this country who like spreading malicious rumours.²⁹

Others were content to overlook the identity or motives of those behind the violence in favour of some closure. Police Commander Soesilo Soedarman stated bluntly, 'There is no need to make connections with this or that. What is important is that there have already been arrests made, including Saleh.'³⁰

The impact of these attacks on churches in Situbondo was felt at the highest levels of government and was deemed by many to pose a serious threat to national stability. Moerdiono (*Menteri Sekretaris Negara*, State Secretary/Minister), remarked, 'This incident could ruin the peaceful religious co-existence that we have been building ... as taught by the state ideology, Pancasila.'³¹ Amien Rais, head of Muhammadiyah, agreed that the violence may have been a part of a national programme of destabilisation and warned, 'Don't be provoked by sides who do not like to see stability in our country.'³² In the aftermath of 10 October, the general opinion expressed by leaders of various socio-political and religious organisations was that the people of Situbondo were indeed victims of a 'bigger scheme'.³³ Baramuli, a member of the team sent by Komnas Ham to investigate the violence in Situbondo, agreed that this local event had a more national context and was not a consequence of religious conflict: 'These things involve sinister persons (*oknum*).'³⁴ However, his team failed to indicate who these *oknum* were.

Meanwhile, local groups were formulating theories around their own suspicions and numerous 'investigations'. The NU youth group Gerakan Pemuda (GP) Ansor produced a report or 'white book' (*buku putih*), essentially to clear NU's name. It concluded that there was a conspiracy of five groups (*konspirasi lima kelompok*), including the military, Muhammadiyah, ICMI, Zaini, local *preman* (thugs or gangsters) and Golkar supporters.³⁵ Reports by Christian groups and by Interfidei did not cast blame in such clear terms but supported the notion that provocation had occurred within an environment hostile to Christians and ethnic Chinese. The military also came under local suspicion for their failure to protect the community. In response, Commander Maj. Gen. Subagio Hadi Siswoyo insisted, 'This is a SARA (ethnic group, religion, race, inter-group relations) issue. If there are criminals like those who burnt shops and other things, it is only being exploited for other gains.'³⁶

Nahdlatul Ulama Divided

To God only do I ask forgiveness for those who did it without knowing the serious consequences for society, the people and the state.³⁷ (Abdurrahman Wahid, NU Chairman).

Amid the national and local discussion of conspiracy theories and claims about the causes of the violence, tensions began to emerge within the dominant Islamic organisation in Situbondo, NU, and between NU and the government, suggesting that the violence was quickly becoming part of a larger political framework. A few days after the violence, at a meeting in Ambon, the Minister for Religion, Tarmizi Taher, called for tougher laws to maintain religious harmony and asked religious leaders to work harder to promote it. In what would have been seen by the predominantly NU *ulama* in Situbondo as a direct criticism of their relationships with their followers, Taher said, 'To understand the aspirations of the people leaders must go down to the grassroots level more often and continue their struggle with the local government and armed forces.'³⁸ The next day NU's leader Abdurrahman Wahid (popularly known as Gus Dur) who had just returned from an ecumenical meeting on world peace in Rome, issued a remarkable press statement. In it he stated that because most of the rioters in Situbondo were NU members, the moral responsibility for the violence should fall on himself as NU chairman. He made this apology:

The majority of residents in the area of the rioting are NU people. Because of that I appeal to all sides, particularly the NU leadership at all levels, to engage in introspection and prepare themselves for self criticism. In the name of NU, I ask forgiveness from the people.³⁹

Wahid went on to say that he believed Muslim leaders continued to be suspicious towards other religions and wanted to be supreme, an attitude which led to conflict like that in Situbondo.

In response to Wahid's apology, representatives from various Christian groups immediately conveyed their gratitude.⁴⁰ However, the response of the NU rank-and-file was different. Reportedly, crowds of NU members visited its headquarters seeking an explanation for Wahid's statement and reassurance that the NU did not believe the violence was a religious issue. This revealed existing strains in the organisation; as Hefner observed, 'Situbondo, one might say, was where the tension between Wahid's enlightened leadership and the NU masses was dangerously apparent.'⁴¹ An NU board member, Ahmad, responded to

the concerns by stating that the violence was a criminal act, that it was not fuelled by religious hatred and that NU members were not involved.⁴² Wahid later admitted that he had not yet received a detailed report about the violence or contacted people in East Java but was waiting until the situation had calmed.

The focus of public and institutional interest in the Situbondo violence quickly turned to tensions within the NU elite, which had escalated beyond the 'apology controversy'. Rumours began to circulate, originating from NU youth groups such as the Indonesian Movement of Islamic Students (*Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*, PMII), that the Situbondo violence had been organised as part of a mass conspiracy to bring down Wahid. The Indonesian Association of Christian Intellectuals (*Persatuan Intelektual Kristen Indonesia*, PIKI) also concluded from their investigations that, 'There were efforts to slander the NU and Gus Dur.'⁴³ Initially Wahid rejected this speculation saying that the violence was the result of religious intolerance and a lack of understanding between residents. He committed the NU to assist in rebuilding damaged churches.

However, days later at a national seminar, the deputy of the NU Executive Board, KH Mohammad Ahmad Sahal Mahfudz, gave what appeared to be another rebuttal of his leader's earlier apology, again exposing tensions within the NU elite. 'To be frank, the Situbondo affair is more related to the character of the local citizens. If there is an opinion and evaluation that the said incident is to be called a religious problem, then it has to be studied again.' Mahfudz also described the majority of Situbondo locals as 'temperamental Madurese residents'.⁴⁴ He was not alone in making such an analysis of the nature of the local people.

Faced with a potential public relations nightmare caused by this open quarrel, Wahid re-entered the debate, but succeeded only in complicating matters further. He made an about-turn from his earlier dismissal of conspiracy theories, to fully acknowledging their intentions. He claimed that the violence in Situbondo had been orchestrated, and named the brains behind it as 'our friends', 'AS' and 'AR'.⁴⁵ All following this story quickly deduced that these were the initials of the leaders of the Islamic organisations ICMI (Adi Sasono) and Muhammadiyah (Amien Rais). In addition, Wahid did not dismiss the possibility that the violence was connected with Army Chief-of-Staff Gen. Hartono's push for the position of Vice President. There had been tensions between Gen. Hartono, and Wahid since the General directed a campaign against Wahid in 1994–96.⁴⁶

Jockeying for Position in an Election Year

Wahid's public airing of conspiracy theories about the Situbondo violence revealed less about the causes of this violence than about political games during an election year in which Suharto continued to set the rules. In early November 1996 in the debate about the causes of the Situbondo violence and the role played by NU, Wahid issued a personal invitation to Suharto to open a NU conference in Probolinggo, East Java.⁴⁷ Wahid had deliberately made NU an apolitical organisation when he withdrew it from the United Democracy Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, PPP) in the mid-1980s, whilst pushing for democracy and openness. In 1996, aware of NU's difficult position at the time, Wahid made a calculated political decision. He sought to take advantage of Suharto's desire to be re-elected in March and, some believed, to move closer to Islam, as he grew older. More pertinently, he would have recognised a common aim shared by Suharto and himself. It is thought that at this time, Suharto was seeking to counter ICMI's support among elements of his own cabinet and in this he and Wahid, a staunch ICMI opponent, had a common goal. In his opening address to the NU *ulama*, Suharto repeated nationalist doctrine and called for assistance, 'Given the diversity of our nation we have to strive to preserve unity and cohesion.'⁴⁸ Afterwards Suharto met Wahid privately for the first time since the cleric had been re-elected as NU Chairman in December 1994. At that time, the cleric had not been invited to the Presidential palace as was customary for new heads of religious organisations. It was widely acknowledged that theirs was a difficult and unfriendly relationship.⁴⁹ Wahid's aides represented Suharto's attendance at the meeting as a sign that the relationship between NU, its leader and the government was healthy. Indeed, a few days later, Wahid announced NU's implicit support for Suharto in his re-election in the 1998 ballot. While insisting that as leader of a non-political organisation he would take a neutral stance Wahid clearly intended to assure the government of his support:

NU is not a social-political organisation with a representative in the MPR. So, NU is completely content to leave the problem of choosing the President to the Special Session of the MPR. And if Pak Harto (Suharto) is chosen again as President by the parliament, NU will support him.⁵⁰

The importance of this meeting was recognised by political commentator Arbi Sanit as signalling a trend towards closer relations between the

government and Islam.⁵¹ It was also significant given that recent intelligence gathered by NU had advised that Wahid was about to become the target of another government attack. The scandal that emerged around the role of Muslims in the violence and Suharto's willingness to make peace with Wahid points to increased concern among some within the New Order elite about the potential for further disturbances. By giving its support to Suharto, NU undertook not to mobilise its large membership against the government; in return Wahid stood to benefit from improved relations with the President. At a time when NU's reputation was suffering due to both the violence in Situbondo and internal friction, Wahid's move to re-align NU with Suharto ensured the organisation of much needed political power *vis-à-vis* its rivals ICMI and also the more radical Indonesian Committee for World Islamic Solidarity (*Komite Indonesia untuk Solidaritas Dunia Islam*, KISDI), which had emerged in the early 1990s as an anti-Western and anti-Christian movement. ICMI and KISDI both had supporters very close to the government including figures in the military, most notably, Commander of the Special Forces (*Kopassus*), Suharto's son-in-law Lt. Gen. Prabowo.⁵²

Local Antipathies Exposed Through the National Discourse

ICMI leader Adi Sasono firmly denied Wahid's alleged accusations of his and Amien Rais' involvement in the Situbondo violence. At the same time, as all around him rejected explanations for the violence based on religious and ethnic antipathies, Sasono alone differed. Adi Sasono was the first social or religious leader to speak of what Hariyanto terms the 'hidden conflict' in Situbondo over the number of churches built without permits in the town.⁵³ In an interview with the magazine *Forum Keadilan*, which was covering the scandal surrounding the NU and the Situbondo violence, Sasono said,

The people are greatly concerned about the [social] imbalance (*kepincangan*) and it is not being resolved. We must recognise their problem. For example, in Situbondo from 27 churches, 3 were built during the Dutch era, four have permits and the rest have no permits. It offends the people's good manners.⁵⁴

Under Indonesian law permits for the construction or extension of places of worship are issued by the Department of Religion. As Christian communities, which included ethnic Chinese, had grown and become

wealthy during the 1980s and 1990s, they had invested in new churches. In local communities like Situbondo extension and construction of churches was a cause of antagonism as it implied expanding congregations and therefore conversions. In addition, the perceived or real failure of churches to obtain the correct permits for the work added to further antipathies in the wider, mostly Muslim, population. Communities complained about the number of vehicles filling the area around a church every Sunday, or around houses being used for Christian gatherings. The Mount Zion Pentecostal Church, the first to be attacked on 10 October, had been at the centre of community friction. Not long before the violence, a petition was signed by local residents to protest against the location of the church on the main street of Situbondo. After the violence, the issue of church building attracted interest from the Minister for Religion, revealing the extent to which this was not only a local but also a national tension. He warned, 'Don't build a place of worship anywhere you feel like it, that can invite conflict.'⁵⁵

In addition to disagreements over the building and location of churches, local tensions existed over land claims and industry development around Situbondo. In most cases, these conflicts involved Chinese-Indonesian business people and local residents. Conflict over land claims at Banongan, including attacks on the local plantation, the local police station, and army post, coincided with the Saleh trial and subsequent violence.⁵⁶

In representations of the 10 October violence by religious, military and political leaders, no mention was made of these tensions between the Chinese-Indonesian business community, Christian churches, and local residents. Descriptions of the violence as religious conflict, and the prevalence of conspiracy theories, overwhelmed representations, leaving no space to touch on local ethnic or class based antipathies.

Local Relationships of Power and Peace: Kiai and the Situbondo Violence

I myself always visit Kiai Sofyan and Kiai Kholil to ask for spiritual assistance (Franky Sastrowijoyo, Chinese-Indonesian businessman and resident of Situbondo).⁵⁷

Locally, explanations of why the public followed the so-called provocateurs were not sought. Instead the issue that occupied public debate was the role of *kiai* and the possibility that conflicts among them allowed the

violence to occur. The story surrounding Saleh's trial and the involvement of several *kiai* remains to be fully told. The actions of Kiai Zaini, who coaxed Saleh, a simple-minded mosque attendant, to sign a statement of sophisticated religious argument and then distributed the letter among the local community may indicate a sinister objective.⁵⁸ Zaini's local NU branch and then the Situbondo branch failed to support his claims, so that questions about Zaini's motives in pursuing Saleh still linger.

A second 'mystery' relates to the lack of assistance the *ulama* gave to police in controlling the crowds at the courthouse, particularly on 10 October. The local NU officials and *ulama* had recognised the potential for violence that day. Speculation surrounds the reasons why Kiai Kholil, the son of As'ad, and other local *ulama* and *kiai* who could have helped to calm the people were sent to Madura for a religious meeting.⁵⁹ Kiai A. Wahid Zaini, head of the local NU branch in nearby Asem Bagus, told *Republika* he was surprised that *kiai* were absent from Situbondo because, he argued, the locals 'are not afraid of the security apparatus, even when the tanks arrive. What they are afraid of, are teachers and leaders, that is the *ulama*. *Ulama* can ask them to cool down the atmosphere so that a riot will never occur.'⁶⁰ Later Kholil was accused by some Muslim groups, including the NU youth group Ansor, of being the *dalang* or puppeteer behind the violence, despite his earlier calls for peace.⁶¹ He rejected the accusations outright and argued that those responsible for the violence could be found hidden behind the government and religious rhetoric: 'democratisation and honesty are nothing but a façade'.⁶²

In their studies, Dhofier and Mansurmoor⁶³ describe the *kiai* as central to Javanese and Madurese society. These leaders and teachers provide diverse services to their followers including spiritual guidance, education, business advice and medical treatment. They have influence and power among the local community and many followers maintain their allegiance for life. These studies also argue that this relationship is not necessarily based on Islam.⁶⁴ Dhofier claims that in a secular Indonesia the *kiai's* appeal increasingly spans tradition and religion: 'Amidst increasing material development, the *kiai* have been regarded as safeguards of the basic moral needs of the Indonesian community.'⁶⁵ The vice principal of a local school, H. Fatchurrasyid, described a system of *cukong* (partner) relationships between Chinese Indonesians and local authorities, including *kiai*, operating in Situbondo and across Java.⁶⁶ A significant portion of a *kiai's* or *ulama's* income comes from gifts and donations from wealthier followers, leading to inevitable tensions in

maintaining a position as a traditional religious leader within a modernising Islam. Rumours about the role of certain *kiai* and *ulama* in the October violence stemmed from their failure to perform the role expected of them as a 'restraining' element.⁶⁷ Why didn't the *kiai* act to prevent conflict this time?

Many Chinese Indonesians left Situbondo after the violence, some permanently but most temporarily. Three months later some Christians were still afraid to worship in the churches. Pastor Magdalena Manahutu explained, 'All the people feel the same like what I feel ... scared and they're nervous and they worry.'⁶⁸ In spite of this fear, when the Chinese-Indonesian community came to acknowledge the causes and culprits of the violence and subsequent terror, they too denied racial or religious sentiment, and protected their relationships with local Islamic leaders. Cornelius Ronowidjojo from PIKI responded, 'All the ulemas that we contacted said they were astounded. They knew nothing of the riots beforehand. They also regretted and condemned the incident.'⁶⁹ Others discounted suggestions of NU involvement.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Adi Sasono's comments exposed the heated issue of building permits and noise and traffic congestion around the churches on Sundays belying protests from the NU and *ulama* in Situbondo that the religious communities co-existed harmoniously. It is not difficult to imagine that ostentatious demonstrations of Christianity in a pious *santri* town could test the limits of tolerance. Certainly, Chinese Indonesians and Christians who remained in or returned to Situbondo recognised the need to curtail the way in which they celebrated their faith. They were careful to take precautions, including displaying a picture of Kiai Kholil in their stores as a sign of solidarity with the cleric and his family.⁷¹

Trials and Justice? The Role of the Military

The Muslims and Christians have lived in peace here for a long time. I believe the people are not guilty. They have only become victims. I think the military should answer who is behind this (Khairul Amam, Muslim youth leader).⁷²

The passive role of the military and police, who failed to prevent or halt the violence, was never properly investigated. Instead, along with religious and political leaders, the security forces pointed to planning and incitement by a 'third party'. They moved quickly, decisively, and also violently, to produce the alleged perpetrators. However, the fact that these 'third

parties' were able to move unimpeded by the police and military for so long also reveals the absence of 'restraining' forces.

In reports about the violence released by a local police team and intelligence officers of the Regional Agency for the Coordination of Support for the Development of National Stability (*Badan Koordinasi Bantuan Pemantapan Stabilitas Nasional*, Bakorstanasda), investigators concluded that the violence had been planned.⁷³ Armed Forces Commander Gen. Feisal Tanjung claimed that meetings had been held to organise the incident. Although adamant about the planning, the team of Bakorstanasda investigators were unable to locate the 'brains' or 'coordinator'.⁷⁴ The military and police arrested over one hundred people and charged 54 within a month of the incident at Situbondo. Trials commenced by December. On 6 December, one of those charged and detained, Ahmad Sidiq, died in hospital as a result of wounds he sustained in detention.⁷⁵ Sidiq was an ascetic Muslim known for his long campaign against military-backed gambling in the villages. Police maintained that Sidiq was already injured at the time of his arrest. The Regional Commander, Maj. Gen. Imam Utomo, claimed that Sidiq had become ill in custody. However, following this death and before the first trial, Situbondo army chief, Lt. Col. Imam Prawoto, was replaced. Utomo stated ambiguously that the dismissal was due to Prawoto's obsession with the violence and locating those responsible for it.⁷⁶ Religious leaders from across the region attended Sidiq's funeral.⁷⁷ The first trial commenced on 16 December 1996, just over two months after the violence. Four men and one woman, aged 21–34 years, were accused of involvement in the burning of the Santo Paulus Church in the adjacent town of Panurukan and charged with criminal damage. Four hundred security personnel were situated around the court. Among the spectators were top military, police, members of the Council of Indonesian Muslim religious teachers and leaders (MUI) and *kiai*.⁷⁸

The Situbondo violence was triggered by a conflict between Muslims and dissatisfaction with the legal process yet, in addition to obvious targets such as the courthouse and government buildings, ethnic Chinese and Christian communities were also singled out. This can partially be explained by the connections made by local people between injustice, economic disparity and the role of ethnic Chinese and Christians. Many antagonisms existed over perceptions that these minorities enjoyed unfair advantage, as demonstrated in how these groups built churches and claimed land by flaunting laws to which the majority must abide. Further, the 'restraints' normally in place to prevent latent hostility from

turning into violence — the security forces and the Muslim clerics — were not present, whilst agents to facilitate it were. There are indications that the violence was systematically carried out and possibly planned, but the involvement of masses of people also indicates antipathies towards the targeted groups. National and local responses avoided such explanations, instead reciting mantra-like ideas of religious harmony and tolerance while affording responsibility not to the security forces and the government but to ‘formless masses’ and individuals. The struggle to represent the Situbondo violence was framed by discourses favourable to the New Order government, no doubt anxious to fend off the impression that the state was losing its control, but other groups also appropriated this struggle for political advantage.

TASIKMALAYA, 26 DECEMBER 1996

There is no problem in being certain about the ‘primary cause’. But it is easier to hope that riots with SARA [suku, agama, ras, antar-golongan: ethnicity, religion, race, intergroup relations] sentiments like this, are not repeated in the future (Bandung Diocese Investigation Team).⁷⁹

Violence by security apparatus begets violence (Bambang Widjojanto, Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation, YLBHI).⁸⁰

As the trials got underway of those accused of the violence in Situbondo, trouble brewed in West Java in the town of Tasikmalaya.⁸¹ Like in Situbondo, the trigger for the violence was unrelated to Chinese Indonesians or Christians, being instead a conflict between local Muslims and police.

On 23 December 1996, two senior students from the Riyadul Ulum Wadda’wah *pesantren* in Condongan village were summoned to the police station in Tasikmalaya to discuss the punishment given to one of their non-residential students, 14-year-old Rizal, son of a police officer, Corporal Nursyami. Their teacher, Kiai Mahmud Farid, the son of the head of the *pesantren*, Kiai Makmun, accompanied them. The men were responding to a letter signed by the local head of police, Lt. Col. Suherman, who had earlier telephoned the school to protest. Rizal was accused of stealing from his fellow students on numerous occasions.⁸²

At the police station the students and their teacher were questioned about Rizal’s punishment. During their interrogation, eight police officers plus Colonel Nursyami were present. The men later recounted that

during their detention they were beaten and forced to remove their clothes and perform various strenuous exercises for long periods.⁸³ News spread throughout Tasikmalaya and district of Kiai Farid's detention, also that he had been taken from the police station directly to hospital. Reportedly thousands of students and local people gathered to hear about his condition. Acknowledging the agitated state of the crowd, Suherman paid a visit to the Condong *pesantren*, where a peace agreement was signed with the police. However, this news did not reach the students and concerned locals, who instead heard a rumour that Farid had died as a result of injuries sustained whilst in detention. The next day, 24 December, after evening prayers an estimated five hundred students from universities and *pesantren* across the district gathered at Tasikmalaya's main mosque. It is not clear how or by whom the meeting was organised, but there are reports that anonymous phone calls were received at many *pesantren*, telling that Farid had died and that a demonstration would be held. Protesters demanded prosecution of the police and an apology to the *pesantren*; they also warned that if these demands were not met within seven days, there would be repercussions.⁸⁴

Tensions Boil Over

On the morning of 26 December, the traffic into Tasikmalaya was unusually heavy. By 9.30 a.m. two thousand people had assembled at the mosque and trucks carrying an estimated six thousand *pesantren* students were due to arrive. It was decided that five representatives from the Communication Forum for Devout Islamic Youths (*Forum Komunikasi Santri dan Generasi Muda*, Fokus Malam), would deliver a letter of concern to Suherman. The police chief indicated that he was prepared to talk and agreed to accompany them back to the mosque. However, it is reported that on the way there he suddenly changed his mind and went back to police headquarters. When Fokus Malam members returned to the mosque with this news, the large crowd grew agitated. As they left the mosque many moved towards police headquarters, situated only half a kilometre away. Witnesses told that they heard men calling the crowd to do so.⁸⁵ Suherman attempted to placate the estimated crowd of thousands. In response they shouted back, 'Lies, lies' and threw stones at the police buildings, demanding that the officers responsible for mistreating Farid and the students be handed over to them.

When this did not eventuate the crowd dispersed across the city. Investigators were later told of people giving commands to the crowd

and directing truckloads of them around the city to various locations.⁸⁶ These reports also state that some of the rioters carried Molotov bombs, which they threw with skill and precision. The first buildings to be targeted were the Matahari and Yogya Department stores, followed by Chinese-Indonesian shops and the Salib Suai Catholic Church. People took statues from the Church and priests' residence and destroyed them, then returned later to set the buildings alight. The efforts of nearby residents prevented the destruction of the Yos Sudarso school behind the church.⁸⁷ When crowds returned the next day and burned the sacristy, they were again stopped from attacking the school. Extensive looting took place, particularly around the commercial centre on Jalan Zaenal Mustofa. In a police round up of looters, more than 160 people were detained, including schoolchildren. Regional Commander Maj. Gen. Tarmidi described those detained as, 'residents tempted into looting. Some of the others were repeat offenders'.⁸⁸ The violence also spread to villages south of Tasikmalaya including Singapura, Kawalu, Bantarkalong and Karangnunggal.⁸⁹

A report compiled by the Fact Finding Team from the office of the Bishop of Bandung concluded that participants in the violence were 'very selective' when choosing their targets.⁹⁰ One witness, named Uron, attested to this selectivity. He told investigators how he had witnessed an attack on a Chinese-Indonesian shop and recalled that, before attacking the shop, they asked the owners of their religion. He added, 'I heard people saying, "expel the Chinese ... expel the Chinese". With those words my heart was moved to join the masses to hate the Chinese.'⁹¹ Uron also observed that those doing the shouting appeared to be drunk. Witnesses report that there was not one police officer on the streets during the violence.

Late on 26 December, troops from the West Java regional command (Siliwangi) and the Jakarta-based Army Strategic Reserve (Kostrad) closed off the major access roads in and out of the city.⁹² Tarmidi and West Java Chief of Police, Maj. Gen. Nana Permana, visited the Condong *pesantren*, after which Makmun announced on radio that his son Farid had not died.⁹³ However, despite this and threats made by Tarmidi of 'harsh action' if the violence did not stop, the next day burning and looting continued in the town and some outlying areas, and included the destruction of a church in Cipatujah, 79 kilometres south of Tasikmalaya.⁹⁴ The total damage included the destruction of 13 churches, one Confucian temple and one Buddhist temple, 89 shops (particularly car showrooms and dealerships), 12 police stations, numerous factories,

schools, banks, hotels, and over one hundred vehicles. Four people died and 15 were injured. Komnas HAM estimated the financial cost at Rp 85 billion.⁹⁵

Resolving Conflict?

The initial response by political and religious leaders, particularly local ones, was to reject the possibility of *pesantren* student involvement in the violence.⁹⁶ They insisted that this was not spontaneous violence perpetrated by locals, the majority of whom were Muslim, but that it was planned and carried out by actors who had come from outside Tasikmalaya.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, local leaders committed themselves to inter-faith dialogue and promotion of religious harmony in the community. The Minister for Religion proposed a meeting of local Muslim and Christian leaders and again called for legislation on religious harmony.⁹⁸ The Christian community instructed its congregation to beware of religious hedonism if they wanted to prevent Java becoming the next Lebanon, Ireland or Yugoslavia.⁹⁹ After meeting with security forces, the Christian community also directed its followers to avoid large and obvious gatherings.¹⁰⁰ They concluded that the victims must accept some of the blame. Meanwhile, President Suharto commented, 'Religious communities need to exercise self restraint, by avoiding activities which may disturb people of other faiths ... or hurt them.'¹⁰¹ In the absence of alternative instruments of conflict resolution or for understanding community violence, a familiar structure for resolution was again applied, despite the fact that it was generally accepted that the causes of this violence were based on more than religious conflict.

In the same way, elite members of the military and government avoided the potential difficulties of interpreting this violence as something other than religious or instigated by a 'third party'. To acknowledge that social disparity and ethnic antagonisms played a part in the violence would force the government to confront the possibility of the failure of its development programmes and, in particular, its SARA policy, which prohibited comments related to religious, ethnic or racial difference. Towards this goal Tarmidi simply urged, 'Let's forget all the wounds and make a fresh start.'¹⁰² Evidently, in what they saw as a move in this direction, the security forces arrested four young Muslim men whom they suspected of organising the meeting at the Police headquarters on 26 December.¹⁰³ These men were generally considered by political commentators and human rights activists to be convenient scapegoats

and were featured on Amnesty International's and Human Rights Watch Asia's list of political prisoners in 1997–98.¹⁰⁴ Nine police officers were also charged and tried by a military court and later dismissed for their role in the assault of Kiai Farid and the students.¹⁰⁵

These symbolic arrests and trials were deemed sufficient by the authorities. No obvious effort was made to identify the *provocateurs* of the violence, who were generally labelled 'criminals' by police and the military. Gen. Feisal Tanjung depicted those involved in the violence as people lacking in patience and recommended that they wait their turn for the benefits of development to trickle down. He painted a picture of the crowds in Tasikmalaya as lacking in self-control, 'Some people become easily upset, violent, lose control and are easily provoked.'¹⁰⁶ It was also a convenient argument for the indispensability of the military as the guardian of national stability. Later, NU leader Abdurrahman Wahid similarly depicted those involved in the riot as simple-minded and ignorant: 'The riots were simply the result of a shallowing process, where people become ignorant of their own religion and therefore become easier to agitate.'¹⁰⁷ By placing the blame for the violence with the 'impatient', 'ignorant' residents and 'outsiders', or with the victims themselves, these leaders and others sidestepped questions about their own accountability and that of their organisations.

Social and Political Consequences: Development Falls Short

'This is very merry. The difference is that last year people walked up and down window-shopping. Tonight they're looking at debris.'
(Haji Uu, 55-year-old resident of Tasikmalaya on New Year's Eve 1996)¹⁰⁸

On New Year's Eve of 1996 the residents of Tasikmalaya filled the streets. In a festive mood they paraded up and down, visiting the sites of fire and destruction from a few days before. Many of them would have walked past burned out factories, shops and offices that had provided them with a source of income and essential consumer goods. As a consequence of the violence on 26 December, an estimated 12,700 people lost their jobs, most of them Muslim Indonesians. The livelihoods of many more were indirectly affected.¹⁰⁹ This immediate and drastic loss of employment for so many made the suffering of the poorer groups in society more acute. Many believed this had the potential to lead to further trouble as Ramadhan and Idul Fitri approached.¹¹⁰

Despite the government's rejection of the idea that economic development was contributing to the difficult social conditions, at the local level in Tasikmalaya it is clear that social divisions played a prominent part in the violence on 26 December. Like Situbondo, Tasikmalaya is known as a devout city. The five largest *pesantren* in West Java are all in Tasikmalaya. At the time of the violence it was home to an estimated 925 *pesantren* with over 64,000 students enrolled under the tutelage of 1,400 Islamic teachers. It was estimated that 99 per cent of the local population were Muslim; of the one per cent who were non-Muslim, the majority were Christians, many being ethnic Chinese.¹¹¹ The Chinese-Indonesian community in Tasikmalaya at this time numbered approximately 4,100 people or just, 0.23 per cent of the total population.¹¹² Yet, at the time of the violence, this tiny minority was considered to control the majority of commerce and industry in the town.

Chinese-Indonesian business had become prominent in Tasikmalaya in the early 1980s. In accordance with the national development programme, Tasikmalaya's mayor had encouraged outside capital into the district. Large investments in transport and communications industries were soon followed by further and more diverse interests. Compared with the neighbouring districts of Garut and Ciamis, Tasikmalaya developed at great pace, fuelled by capital from both foreign investors and Chinese-Indonesian firms. Some of this investment moved into industries traditionally controlled by *pribumi*, including the production of batik textiles.¹¹³

As they became more numerous and prospered in the district, Chinese Indonesians built new facilities including banks, shopping centres and churches. Many locals considered these new additions to the city to be symbols of wealth and associated them directly with the Chinese-Indonesian community. Hasan Basri, head of the local branch of ICMI and national leader of the MUI, articulated the perceptions held by many locals about the ethnic Chinese and particularly their relationship with corrupt local authorities. To ISAI (Institute for the Free Flow of Information) investigators he presented the scenario of a traffic accident involving a *pribumi* and a Chinese Indonesian. He told them, 'They (Chinese) just stand with their hands on their hips getting angry. They are brave because they have the backing of the security personnel.'¹¹⁴ He added that it was well known that if a dispute progressed to the police station, the ethnic Chinese would always win because they could give the larger bribe.

Despite the surge of economic growth and development in Tasikmalaya many were being left behind. Many also believed that the division between those who possessed new wealth and those who did not was drawn along ethnic and religious lines.¹¹⁵ One political commentator wrote at the time, 'In Indonesia those who are ready for competition happen to be Chinese, while the Indonesian majority are not. The Chinese are (then) deemed a Christian society. The fact that most churches also receive donations from abroad ... makes it easier for Christian society to win the competition.'¹¹⁶ Abdurrahman Wahid agreed that the economic disparity between these two groups was based on religious and ethnic difference, 'We're not blaming the Chinese-Indonesian traders for their economic supremacy. But the Moslem traders should be given the opportunity to do business.'¹¹⁷

During the 1990s in Tasikmalaya there were conflicts within the community over the issue of advantages given to non-*pribumi* business. The suspicion of collusion between Chinese-Indonesian business and local government officials and judges had led to community protests. In 1995 after a fire destroyed the Tasikmalaya market, the authorities decided to re-build it at a new location. Many traders believed that they would be disadvantaged by the move and that non-*pribumi* were being given the best sites at the new market. It was suspected that the local authorities were colluding with non-*pribumi* business on this project.¹¹⁸ After the violence on 26 December, many locals agreed that it was motivated by feelings of social jealousy and marginalisation. The head of a local small business organisation, Tatang Setiawan, described the actors in the violence as, 'those who feel oppressed by the power of the conglomerates (commonly understood as big business controlled by ethnic Chinese)'.¹¹⁹ Albert Hasibuan from Komnas HAM commented, 'Among other things, this riot occurred because of the social divide. The majority of people feel that there is a small section of the community with a better economic situation and who are less interactive among them.'¹²⁰

Making the Connections

What did social inequality and animosity against Chinese Indonesians in Tasikmalaya have to do with the protest by Muslim students at police headquarters? As Hasan Basri's story clearly shows, a connection between police corruption and brutality and subsequent attacks on Christian churches and Chinese-Indonesian businesses could be made. Furthermore,

it appears that the authorities' obligation to protect the Chinese-Indonesian community was maintained during the chaos and violence. On 26 and 27 December, most of the four to five thousand Chinese Indonesians took shelter in government offices and in a military complex under the protection of security forces, as well as at the homes of their *pribumi* neighbours.¹²¹

Like in Situbondo, targets for violence in Tasikmalaya included police stations and symbols of government and authority, as well as other symbols of oppression. These included the new churches built by Christian congregations, shopping malls, supermarkets that had replaced traditional markets, and smaller Chinese-Indonesian shops. The violence was largely a rejection of a process of modernity by people who had been left behind by it, but also the rejection of a corrupt system of local authority, which was perceived to denigrate Islam. However, the antipathies which prompted people involved in the violence to shout angry slogans and derogatory slurs against Chinese Indonesians like 'Long live Muslims, Destroy the Chinese' and 'Expel the Chinese'¹²² along with anti-police slogans such as, 'Police are Thieves too' demonstrated the extent to which these feelings of marginalisation were bound to ethnic prejudices. As other slogans heard that day attest, including 'Don't think Islam is passive', 'Islam wants justice' and 'We are free from Chinese economic domination',¹²³ it could also be seen as an assertion of the power and identity of members of the Muslim community.

In the weeks following the violence, Chinese-Indonesian businessmen were reluctant to open their shops and Christian prayer meetings were held discretely at private homes.¹²⁴ Many Chinese-Indonesian shop owners had received threatening phone calls in the week after the violence warning them not to open their shops. The local police force also went underground. In fact, police did not resume their normal duties until months later. In the period immediately following the violence, armed forces troops and youth groups patrolled the streets. Later, an all-female police corps was charged with protecting the residents of Tasikmalaya.¹²⁵

The 'history' of tensions between the Chinese-Indonesian and *pribumi* communities in Tasikmalaya, ostensibly because of social jealousies and corruption, meant that many residents could easily separate the burning of Christian churches on 26 December, from issues of religious conflict. Leader of the local branch of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Kiai Dochlan Chudori, explained it clearly, 'The burning of the church does not indicate a lack of inter-religious tolerance. But the

church is identified as a symbol of the economic gap.¹²⁶ However, Pastor Hilman of the Kudus Yesus Catholic Church in Tasikmalaya called for a more balanced assessment of the members of his congregation. Admitting that ninety per cent of his parishioners were ethnic Chinese, he insisted that their success was due to hard work but he added that, 'In my congregation there are also many who do not have abilities in commerce.'¹²⁷ Because local and national leaders never attempted to address these (mis)perceptions about stereotypes of Chinese Indonesians, in Tasikmalaya it had come to the point where anything 'Christian' or 'Chinese', was associated with economic and social inequality. When put in these terms, notions of tolerance and harmony could be easily overlooked.

Communities Divided

The national interpretations of the violence in Tasikmalaya and Situbondo rested upon the social and economic divide. Blame was variously placed on provocateurs, an ignorant local community, and even the victims. The SARA-related issues that arose during this violence, however, revealed a divided community. As with the Situbondo case, Indonesians struggled to understand how a conflict between police and students of Islam could lead to the burning of Chinese-Indonesian shops. It was recognised that the Tasikmalaya and Situbondo cases could not be isolated from each other or from violence elsewhere in the country at the time. Baharuddin Lopa from Komnas HAM pointed to violence against ethnic Chinese in Situbondo and also that between Dayak and Madurese in West Kalimantan in early January, as evidence that the Tasikmalaya violence was not simply a local conflict, warning, 'The use of violence is regrettable; it is essential to continually develop mutual understanding among the ethnic groups.'¹²⁸ In the wake of the second incident of violence in Java within a month, some political and social commentators, turned their focus on the increased marginalisation felt by many in the face of the encroaching development process,¹²⁹ and decried the use of jargon such as 'third party' and 'communist threat' by the government and elements of the military elite.¹³⁰ Academics and commentators also opposed the initiative proposed by Komnas HAM leader Baharuddin Lopa to create a new forum to promote religious harmony. They argued that this was not conflict based on religious tension and charged that the government responded only to the 'symptoms' of social problems; it did not act to prevent them.¹³¹ These same voices spoke out in opposition to a proposal

by the government and military to establish 'alert command centres' in local and regional areas to monitor and prevent unrest. It was suspected that this plan sounded very much like the brief of the discredited and disbanded Operation Command for the Restoration of Security and Order (*Komando Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban*, KOPKAMTIB), which in 1988 had been replaced by the National Stability Coordinating Body (*Badan Koordinasi Bantuan Pemantapan Stabilitas Nasional*, BAKORSTANAS).¹³²

Meanwhile, in mid-January President Suharto and Army Commander Gen. Feisal Tanjung still refused to acknowledge the limitations of the government's development and national security programme. Suharto remained focused: 'Our development is based on stability. Without national stability there will be no development, without development there will be no growth. Without growth there will be no parity.'¹³³ In an explicit attempt to divert attention from the responsibility of his government or the military for failing to contain the violence in Tasikmalaya and elsewhere, he engaged a discourse integral to his rule.¹³⁴ In a statement about the violence, Suharto again conjured up a group of 'formless masses': 'They are applying the Mao Zedong theory in which they seek to control the villages and then cities.... These troublemakers mess the villages up first and then continue their disturbance into the city.'¹³⁵

The response of local people in Tasikmalaya raises some questions about the participants in anti-Chinese violence. Only days after the violence a festive atmosphere reigned as the community celebrated the calendar New Year. Did local participants fail to see the economic consequences of such violence for themselves? Why did people burn the entire contents of shops rather than loot and take them home? Why did they take delight in destroying the factory they worked in? The counter theoretical question here is to ask whether the violence was an instrumental action with a particular purpose, or merely a 'frenzy'? For Horowitz, the distinction between collective violence that can be described as economically motivated (with particular aims and demands for lower prices and so on), and collective violence motivated by ethnic antipathies, is the scale of destruction 'even of property that rioters might have chosen to steal instead'.¹³⁶

As 1996 drew to a close, President Suharto reflected upon the previous twelve months, highlighting in particular the high rate of economic growth. Without referring to specific events, he lamented that 1996 had also been marked by social upheaval. Yet he failed to recognise

the importance of this period of unrest for the future of his Presidency, simply restating an inflexible nationalist programme: 'This is why we have to prevent these upheavals from recurring. We have to be able to place the interests of this nation above the interests of individuals and groups.'¹³⁷

VIOLENCE IN RENGASDENGKLOK, 30 JANUARY 1997

On 16 August 1945 Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta were brought to the home of ethnic Chinese Rengasdengklok resident, Daniel Kristiadi or Djiauw Hoy Lin, by youths who were intent on 'compelling' the leaders to declare Indonesian independence.¹³⁸ Almost 32 years later, on 30 January 1997, the crowds spared Pak Kristiadi's *Rumah Sejarah* or historic house, whilst nearby homes owned by Chinese Indonesians were attacked. Rengasdengklok's location, in the same province as Tasikmalaya, and only 75 kilometres from Jakarta, is a vital part of this story. Like Situbondo and Tasikmalaya, the violence was precipitated by an incident in which people perceived that Islam had been denigrated. This time, however an ethnic Chinese resident was directly involved.

Breaking the Fast

On 30 January 1997 during the fasting month of Ramadan, Cik Gue and her husband Kim Tjoan were awoken early by drums and shouting from the mosque next to their house in Warudoyong kampung, near the Rengasdengklok market. As usual during Ramadan, at this hour a group of youths from the mosque walked around the kampung banging a drum and calling Muslims to wake and eat before dawn. This ritual could not have been new to Cik Gue and her family, who had lived in this kampung for many years. In later testimony, Cik Gue claimed that the loudspeaker used to broadcast the call to prayer, which normally faced away from her house, had been moved so that it pointed directly towards it.¹³⁹ Unable to sleep due to the noise, Cik Gue and Kim Tjoan went outside and confronted the group of youths. They demanded that the boys stop making noise and threatened to call the police. The youths attested that the couple were abusive. At this point Feri, Cik Gue's fifteen-year-old son, allegedly climbed onto the roof of the house and threw stones at the mosque, breaking a window. The youths retaliated, throwing stones at the house and at Kim Tjoan. His daughter, Merih, recounts that her father was struck twice, causing him to fall to the

ground. A policeman soon arrived and appeared to resolve the issue. However, the youths felt unfairly treated. They did not believe that the family had accepted the blame for the disturbance but perceived the policeman's rebuke as directed towards themselves.

After taking their pre-dawn meal, the youths returned to the house accompanied by a larger crowd. They again attacked the house with stones, this time forcing the family to flee. Merih told investigators that as the crowds descended on the house, she heard people shouting, 'Burn it, just like Tasikmalaya, just like Tasik' and 'This is exactly like Tasik'.¹⁴⁰ The house was on a main thoroughfare through the kampung to the nearby market, so news of Kim Tjoan and Cik Gue's blasphemy soon spread. A large crowd of passers-by gathered and watched as the house was destroyed. By 8 a.m. the crowd was quiet, but the peace was short-lived. By this time the crowd was estimated to have grown to three thousand people. Someone within the crowd began to urge people to attack Kim Tjoan's shop at Rengasdengklok market, and in response to these calls they fanned out.¹⁴¹

Throughout the morning the crowds attacked and burned churches, Chinese-Indonesian shops and homes, a Confucian hall and a Buddhist temple.¹⁴² At the Buddha Surya Adhi Guna temple, statues, books, carpets and other items were dragged outside and destroyed. In what has become an enduring image of this event, the head of a statue of Buddha was placed in a noose and hung from the gates of the burning temple. During the violence, army and police troops were present on the streets but witnesses attest that they did little to stop it.¹⁴³ The violence was mostly concentrated around Warungdong kampung near the commercial and shopping districts, but in the afternoon it spread to other areas where many Chinese Indonesians lived. At 5 p.m. the security authorities finally brought the crowds under control, deploying a helicopter to disperse them.¹⁴⁴ By this time the damage to Rengasdengklok was immense. The city's buildings were covered in graffiti identifying the owners as Muslim or *pribumi*, and anti-Chinese slogans. The factories, shops and houses attacked were, with few exceptions, Chinese-Indonesian, including properties owned by ethnic Chinese Muslims.¹⁴⁵

Afterwards, local authorities insisted that Rengasdengklok residents were not involved in the organisation or incitement of people to violence. Mayor Mochtar, defended his constituents: 'I don't yet know where the masses came from. What is clear is that Rengasdengklok residents were not involved. Ojek drivers, becak drivers and others, none of them joined in.'¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that charges were

filed against 21 people, who were later sentenced to one to two month jail terms. By comparison, Kim Tjoan, Cik Gue's husband, was charged with blasphemy and received a penalty of three and a half years in prison. HRW concluded, 'The relative harshness of his sentence, compared to those of the rioters, indeed the fact that Tjio Kim Tjoan was arrested at all, appeared to be evidence of anti-Chinese discrimination.'¹⁴⁷

Cik Gue, Building Permits and the *Tugu Kemenangan Cina*

The non-Muslim family ought to understand that the noise of the drum is proper (*wajar*), especially in the fasting month (Lukman Harun, Muhammadiyah).¹⁴⁸

After they had destroyed Cik Gue's house, as though their actions had not been clear enough, people scrawled graffiti on its walls. They wrote variously, 'Savage infidels', 'Satanic infidels', 'Villainous infidels', 'Chinese infidels'. One of the youths involved in the initial quarrel with Kim Tjoan and Cik Gue later argued that the decision to attack their house had nothing to do with their ethnicity: they were simply bad neighbours. 'The reason I don't like her', said Hendra Kurnia, a resident of Warudoyong kampung and attendant at the Miftahul Jannah mosque, 'is not because she is Chinese and also not because her religion is different to ours, but because her behaviour and attitude is strange. They are never neighbourly.'¹⁴⁹ Others from the kampung similarly reported that the family did not try to mix with their neighbours, yet were careful to point to other ethnic Chinese residents with whom they did get along. One neighbour emphasised that this was a personal, rather than an ethnic or racial problem, by stating, 'It's not just *pribumi*. Other WNA (*warga negara asing*, foreigners) also dislike her manner, which is less than congenial.'¹⁵⁰ Despite such assurances that ethnic hostility was not the motivation for violence that destroyed over 70 houses owned by Chinese Indonesians, even Ceng Bouw, an ethnic Chinese Warudoyong resident whom many *pribumi* attested to 'getting along with' and even liked, was too afraid to leave his home thereafter.¹⁵¹

In 1996 the Chinese-Indonesian population of Rengasdengklok was estimated to be 3,725 out of 190,000 — less than two per cent of the population.¹⁵² Chinese Indonesians were generally perceived to be wealthy and, through their partnerships with corrupt local officials, unfairly so. Indeed, many locals believed that ethnic Chinese revelled in the success they achieved at the expense of others. In 1992, two Chinese-Indonesian businesses erected a monument at a busy intersection in the

commercial district in what they saw as a promotional exercise. However, some *pribumi*, including the head of the local MUI branch, H. Sobarna Noor, felt threatened by it.¹⁵³ The monument was widely labelled the 'Chinese Victory Monument', as it was seen by some as a symbol of 'gloating'. Some even identified its construction with the promotion of a programme of 'Christianisation' in Rengasdengklok, led by wealthy Chinese-Indonesian business people. They argued that the monument contained religious symbolism because its top was cone-shaped, resembling the headwear of the Catholic Pope. Recent renovation of the Indonesian Christian Church (*Gereja Kristen Indonesia*, GKI) in Rengasdengklok, originally built in the 1960s, also added to anxiety among some members of the Muslim community about the threat of Christian expansion. The need to increase the capacity of the church alarmed them for they believed it indicated that the number of Christians in the town was increasing, which translated to conversions. In response to these perceived 'threats' of Christianisation MUI leader Sobarna challenged the conditions of a local government building permit for the church.

Why Here? Why Now?

Communal ideology may reflect hatred of other groups, but in Nandy's reckoning it may also be an expression of a group's attempt to create a legitimate space for itself in the public domain — especially in view of the homogenising pressures of the modern state (Veena Das).¹⁵⁴

They (the economically disparaged) have been so deprived socially and economically they have become like a piece of dry wood, easily set alight (Amien Rais).¹⁵⁵

Anti-Chinese graffiti and the destruction of religious sites again demands consideration of the aims of violent outbreaks. Horowitz's explanation of the intent to degrade and humiliate the target group certainly resonates here.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, perhaps more insightful is Das' call for analysis of the symbolic aspect of violence in terms of space and time as a means to providing insight into the high levels of brutality against non-Muslim sites in Rengasdengklok and elsewhere. Das argues that antipathies are displayed around spaces with symbolic elements for a community: such spaces are not restricted to 'sacred spaces' like churches and temples but include 'ordinary' or public space. Attacks on monuments or buildings identified with the Chinese-Indonesian business community,

and with perceptions of the expansion of Christianity in the town, demonstrate how the ‘control of sacred space and their protection continues to be an important symbol’ around which conflicts are organised.¹⁵⁷ In his studies of riots in Indonesia, John Sidel argues that violence against property and goods is also an avenue by which new claims on the urban landscape and sacrifices can be made.¹⁵⁸

To follow Das’ argument further, not only is the struggle for symbolic space worth considering, but also its ‘temporal space’ or timing. Rita Junita, a local Chinese-Indonesian businesswoman who spoke perfect Sundanese — the local regional language — posed a salient question about why the violence occurred at this time and not at another: ‘The division is everywhere, for a long time, since the Dutch era there was a division. Why is this happening now? I think the reason lies beyond the social gap.’¹⁵⁹ What then caused hostility to boil up into emotions strong enough to drive mass violence in Rengasdengklok? Can it be concluded, as Amien Rais did, that this was class-based violence, fuelled by frustrations born of racial prejudice and economic competition, ‘exploding’ in a combustible environment? That the precipitant can be linked directly to the target of the violence suggests the relevance of a cumulative aggression theory such as those supported by Allport, Horowitz and others.¹⁶⁰ However, the preceding violence in Tasikmalaya and Situbondo had raised new questions about theories of cause and effect in relation to events involving anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia.

The mass violence in Situbondo and Tasikmalaya goes some way to answering why violence took place in Rengasdengklok. The memory of the first two cases played a role in focusing crowd attention during the early stages of the violence in this third case in five months. Prior violence against Chinese Indonesians in Situbondo and Tasikmalaya gave legitimacy to this type of violence as an expression of dissatisfaction carried out with near impunity. Its timing during Ramadan is also significant. It appears that the quarrel that triggered it was related to the fasting month. This might also explain why the violence was able to spread without police resistance. Police intervention in the initial dispute at Cik Gue’s house failed to prevent further violence, as it might have done in other circumstances. West Java Chief of Police, Maj. Gen. Permana, shed light on this when he suggested that the fact that it was Ramadan affected the ability of the security forces to control the violence: ‘This is the fasting month. People need to go to mosques in the evening for reading and learning the Holy Koran. How can we stop them?’¹⁶¹ Other restraints on participants in the violence also failed. Efforts by

local authorities during the early part of the day to halt the violence and calm the people were ineffective. Moreover, when Mayor Mochtar asked local *ulama* to join in a dialogue calling for calm, it was apparent that cracks were beginning to appear in this normal framework for conflict resolution. The mayor and the secretary of MUI Rengasdengklok disagreed on what had caused the violence. The mayor argued that certain parties had incited it, while Sobarna maintained that it was a spontaneous outburst in response to the abusive actions of Cik Gue and Kim Tjoan.¹⁶²

An Act of 'Normal' Anti-Chinese Violence

We are not against other religions, but buildings that change their functions can become a time bomb (Secretary of MUI Rengasdengklok, Sobarna).¹⁶³

Responses to violence in Rengasdengklok were less vocal or prolific than to Situbondo and Tasikmalaya. In particular, violence against non-Islamic places of worship and Chinese-Indonesian property was not received with the same degree of shock or condemnation from national and local leaders and the media. Army Commander Gen. Feisal Tanjung, Komnas HAM and other members of the national elite agreed with Mayor Mochtar that the violence occurred at that time because social tensions were manipulated by a third party.¹⁶⁴ Tanjung once again involved a 'bogey-man' from the past in order to apportion blame: 'Those who did the burning are PKI [communists]', he said.¹⁶⁵

The Rengasdengklok incident was treated differently in public discourse from the Tasikmalaya and Situbondo cases because the event that triggered it, a conflict between an ethnic Chinese couple and a group of Muslim youths, demonstrated an obvious link to the targets. Whilst the elite and the public identified the same reasons behind the violence — economic frustration and anti-government elements — the degree of agreement was greater and quicker to take hold. There was not the same questioning at the national level about why the violence happened and, in particular, why certain people and places were targeted. The explanation that an ethnic Chinese couple defaming Islam triggered the violence appeared satisfactorily to explain why homes and businesses owned by other Chinese Indonesians and their places of worship were attacked too. These differing responses indicate much about how 'anti-Chinese violence' had been represented and 'normalised' in Indonesian society. Doubts intrude, however, when the triggering event has no relationship to the targets of the subsequent violence, as happened in

Situbondo and Tasikmalaya. How could violence be ‘anti-Chinese’ if the trigger did not involve ethnic Chinese?

As a consequence of these different interpretations, the victims were also classified differently. A poignant illustration of the different response to the violence in Rengasdengklok was the complete absence of sympathy for Cik Gue and her family, whose house had been completely destroyed and who were forced to flee the town. When her husband was sent to gaol for inciting religious hatred, there was general commendation that justice had been done. This is compared to the national mourning for the five victims in Situbondo, who were also ethnic Chinese. From these cases it would appear that at least some of the public response to violence targeting Chinese Indonesians is regulated by the extent to which blame can apportion to Chinese Indonesians themselves or, more accurately perhaps, by how it is represented in the official local and national discourses.

National Reverberations

If riots continue, the armed forces will take sterner action ... because this country is based on the rule of law (Commander of the Armed Forces, Gen. Feisal Tanjung).¹⁶⁶

The above narratives of violence in Rengasdengklok, Situbondo and Tasikmalaya do not expose central government or military involvement in the violence at the level of instigation or provocation, even though security forces were partly responsible due to their failure to protect the victims and for allowing the violence to continue. What are exposed are the local antipathies based on the social gap and racial and religious difference. Although such sentiments were by no means exclusive to these towns, the violence was essentially local.

These incidents became part of a discourse perpetuated by the government and various groups as part of their political agendas. The military and political elite interpreted the Rengasdengklok incident as further sign that control needed to be re-asserted throughout the country, particularly with an election approaching. Minister for Information Harmoko told representatives of the Indonesian press to avoid journalism that incited hatred and violence, to keep to the facts. He reminded them, ‘The spirit of the New Order is the spirit of development. The mass media has a clear commitment, that is to support development and stand for justice and truth.’¹⁶⁷ Similarly, Gen. Feisal Tanjung accused some of the press of allowing themselves to be influenced by unscrupulous

parties who were 'twisting historical facts' about the coup attempt in September 1965 and subsequent mass killings 1965–66 in order to destabilise the nation. In February the armed forces announced that they had taken steps towards establishing the 'Alert Command Posts' that had been drafted by the government the previous month amid considerable opposition from public intellectuals.¹⁶⁸

However, the government's dismissal of the Situbondo and Tasikmalaya conflicts as part of a dark conspiracy to destabilise the nation were beginning to ring hollow for many Indonesians. The ineptitude of the government in dealing with the increasingly frequent social disturbances and violence became more obvious with each incident. Some commentators and representative groups began to turn the focus and responsibility for the recent violence back on to local and national authorities. The Union of Indonesian Catholic Students condemned the government's role in creating social frustration: 'The uneven distribution of state wealth has created economic disparity.' Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) argued that the legal and justice systems were perceived by the people as no longer serving their interests: 'People tend to take the law into their own hands in settling social problems because they consider themselves as the losers.'¹⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

The numerous riots have only added to the nation's burden, worsened the nation's hardships, tarnished a certain religion and weakened unity (The Communion of Churches in Indonesia).¹⁷⁰

Chinese Indonesians in these three towns became targets of violence on the basis of both their ethnicity and localised antipathies related to economic jealousies and fears of Christianisation. The violence took place at a time of increasing frustration associated with the wealth gap and coincided with calls for a greater political role for Islam. As Aronson observed, 'frustration leads to aggression ... against an outgroup member'.¹⁷¹ In their roles as traders and business people, Chinese Indonesians had contributed to antagonisms among the majority *pribumi* community by building modern shopping centres in place of traditional markets, colluding with government authorities, investing in traditional *pribumi* industries, and in general by becoming visibly wealthy. The economic position of Chinese Indonesians was not the only reason for tension; religion was also a focus of conflict. As well as Chinese-Indonesian shops and homes, Christian churches and Buddhist and Confucian

buildings with majority ethnic Chinese congregations, were attacked. In each case, particularly in Situbondo and Rengasdengklok, Muslim residents had expressed concern about the spread of Christianity, which they believed was evident through the building of new places of worship.

Nationally, the struggle between Islamic groups and the political elite formed a context within which expressions of Muslim identity and its defence were deemed more acceptable. Data compiled by Thomas Santoso shows a sharp escalation in attacks on churches in the two-year period 1995–97.¹⁷² The number of churches recorded as closed, destroyed or burnt down in Indonesia in this period was 89 or 44.5 per year. This was an increase from the decade 1985–94 which saw 132 cases at a rate of 13 per year. The violence in Situbondo in particular was politicised, particularly by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). President Suharto's willingness to accept Abdurrahman Wahid's conciliatory gestures in November 1996 indicated that the New Order had recognised the political benefits of gaining the support of NU's very large membership. Locally, perceived abuse of the Islamic faith by an Indonesian court, police officers, and an old ethnic Chinese woman were sufficient to lead Muslims and others to violence. In Tasikmalaya the ICMI leadership reacted to justify rather than to condemn the violence. The message at both the national and local levels was that some Muslims were tired of what they saw as degradation of Islam and frustrated with having to give concessions to minority groups, whilst accepting political neutrality. Perceived as agents for an oppressive system, Chinese Indonesians became 'rational scapegoats'.

The minimal responses of the various security forces during these events — their failure to negotiate with protesters in Tasikmalaya, inadequate numbers of police at the courthouse in Situbondo, the general absence of police on the streets in Rengasdengklok — is essential for understanding why the violence was permitted to spread and why it occurred on such a scale in these places and not in others. Initially, Gen. Hartono admitted that the military did not want to risk antagonising an already volatile situation by rushing in, guns blazing. Many other cases could be cited, however, where they had done exactly that. The timing of the Tasikmalaya and Rengasdengklok cases, the former at Christmas and the latter in Ramadan, provide further clues as to why security forces were unwilling to intervene. Security agents admitted with respect to Rengasdengklok that people needed to be able to get to their prayers and that troops were not prepared to interrupt that ritual, even for the sake of peace. In Tasikmalaya the destruction of churches,

which police and army failed to protect, had more profound impact because it coincided with Christmas.

These and other violent incidents across the archipelago at this time, particularly in West Kalimantan, indicated that Indonesia had entered another period of political instability as a nation-state. Yet the formulaic response given by the New Order government was unchanged: adhere to the nationalist principles of *Pancasila* and wait patiently for your own economic success. This rhetoric no longer satisfied the increasingly restless masses. The security forces and local elites also failed to provide assurances of security and justice. Violence against Chinese-Indonesian and non-Islamic places of worship symbolised a frustration with the New Order nationalist doctrine and, in particular, its programme of development and modernity, in which so many were being left behind. People marked out their claims to a share in development by attacking symbols of their marginalisation.

Politicians, religious leaders and citizens had difficulty comprehending the violence in Situbondo and Tasikmalaya because it could not easily be classified and did not fit into the 'normal' understandings of 'anti-Chinese violence'.¹⁷³ As Gyanendra Pandey wrote about mass violence in India, 'The violence itself is taken as "known". Its contours and character are simply assumed: its forms need no investigation.'¹⁷⁴ The frequency of such conflicts leading to violence against Chinese Indonesians added to the sense of acceptability or inevitability of these acts. Attacks on churches were not new in Java. Yet very few attacks have attracted the nation's attention like these cases. As recently as 9 June 1996, ten churches had been attacked in Surabaya without raising similar public concern.

Commentators and authorities alike had difficulty labelling these violent events, which were grouped with others in West Kalimantan and elsewhere during this period. Many groups, including the government, attempted to explain these incidents as comprising a 'trend' that was anti-government or caused by socio-economic frustration. These interpretations failed to consider the reasons why opposition to the government, or frustration with the economic gap, consistently led to attacks on a particular ethnic minority — Chinese Indonesians. The closest public discourse and national leaders came to acknowledging the ethnicity of 'targets' as indicative of deeper social problems, was in forums and meetings between various religious groups after the violence. The instruments for conflict resolution available under the New Order regime began and ended with inter-faith dialogue. Moreover, this conversation

about inter-religious union continued in the midst of an elite power struggle for Presidential favour between factions within Islam. In a surprising about turn, Suharto switched favour from ICMI and its leadership including Muhammadiyah leader Amien Rais, whom he expelled from ICMI in early 1997 for his outspokenness, to a previous staunch opponent, Abdurrahman Wahid. As the election drew closer the President sought to exclude and co-opt his main opponents, but this time it did nothing to quell wider social discontent. Government calls for people 'to be patient' by conjuring the rhetoric of harmony, only added to popular frustrations.¹⁷⁵

3

Rising Anti-Chinese Sentiment

We have always hedged our bets. Firstly, we have never believed that the government would protect us. Secondly, as Chinese we know we are going to be discriminated against (Anonymous Chinese Indonesian).¹

Elections and Declining Security

Violent clashes continued through the period of campaigning for the parliamentary elections held on 29 May 1997. With the PDI paralysed by the split between supporters of Megawati and Suryadi, PPP and its largely Muslim membership found itself the sole challenger to Golkar's dominance. During its campaign, PPP stressed concerns about vote rigging by the government and demanded that democratic process be followed or it would reject the results of the election. PPP gatherings drew large and enthusiastic crowds. At campaign rallies and polling booths across the country, clashes occurred between rival PPP and Golkar supporters, such as in the Jakarta coastal town of Pekalongan on 30 March 1997 and again in the South Kalimantan city of Banjarmasin on 25 May, as each tried to claim territory.² Chinese Indonesians were frequently targeted in this violence.

Golkar was comfortably returned to power with 74 per cent of the vote, but PPP increased theirs with 22 per cent at the expense of a shattered PDI (3 per cent, down from 15 per cent in 1992).³ As PPP had anticipated, vote rigging was widespread and evoked public outcry. Rather than a *pesta demokrasi* or festival of democracy aimed to bolster its authority, 'the May 1997 election served to undermine the already shaky legitimacy and democratic credentials of the regime'.⁴ There were also signs of more unrest to come. In July 1997 *The Economist* noted,

‘For millions of disadvantaged young Indonesians, however, there was a lesson in the election campaign: Islam is a much more acceptable vehicle for venting frustrations than any political ideology.’⁵

Violence against Chinese Indonesians continued after the election. An incident occurred in Kadipaten, West Java on 2 June after a rumour that an ethnic Chinese shop-owner had strip-searched a *pribumi* female, whom he had accused of shoplifting. The largest incident at this time took place in Sulawesi’s main city of Makassar, beginning on 15 September and lasting several days. Benny Karre, a 23-year-old Chinese Indonesian man diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic, allegedly stabbed and murdered a nine-year-old girl, Anni, and her 20-year-old companion, Norma on their way home from religious classes. Following Benny’s arrest and subsequent ‘mysterious’ escape, he was found bashed and later died in hospital from his injuries. Across the city, shops and other property were attacked including banks and hotels, most of them owned by Chinese Indonesians. By the end over 1,400 buildings had been damaged or destroyed, there was an estimated Rp17.5 billion in damage and six people were dead.⁶ Horowitz wrote sanguinely that, ‘a double murder by a Chinese produced an easily controlled attempt to lynch the culprit, but nothing more’.⁷ However, violent attacks on Chinese-Indonesian property continued for about forty hours after Benny’s death, suggesting ethnic violence fuelled by some intensity of anti-Chinese sentiment.

The violence against Chinese-Indonesian property during clashes between groups around the time of the election can be explained as by-products of social unrest and frustration, whilst the violence later at Makassar and Kadipaten, occurred within the more ‘normal’ parameters of ‘anti-Chinese violence’ in Indonesia. These were, nonetheless, isolated and local events. In 1997 violence against ethnic Chinese occurred within the context of other forms of violence, being both simultaneous and distinct. Changes in economic and political conditions in the latter half of 1997 and early 1998, however, resulted in more overt anti-Chinese violence, with a more deliberate level of intent.

The Economy in Crisis

Nowhere has the Asian economic crisis been felt with such devastating effect as in Indonesia.⁸

As outlined briefly in the previous chapter, in the early 1990s Indonesia’s economy was booming. Growth in the manufacturing and construction

sectors and low inflation had buoyed employment and real wages. In April 1997 one economist reported: 'Growth continues at a rapid rate. Foreign exchange reserves, already more than adequate, are increasing rapidly; high capital inflow more than covers the account deficit.... Share prices are at a record level.'⁹ Within six months of the parliamentary elections, however, the economy was in crisis.

Beginning with the collapse of the Thai baht in early July 1997 international markets lost confidence in Southeast Asian currencies. The Indonesian rupiah lost almost seven per cent of its value, dropping from Rp2,450 to Rp2,700. The decision to float the currency on 14 August enjoyed wide support, but the rupiah continued to slide. In his Independence Day speech on 17 August, Suharto assured the nation that the economic fundamentals remained solid and that the currency crisis was only a 'temporary upheaval'.¹⁰ However, this stability failed to eventuate. By 6 October the rupiah had dropped further to around Rp4,000 to the US dollar. In the last quarter for 1997, Indonesia's economic growth slowed to only 1.4 per cent, compared to 7.3 per cent in the first quarter.¹¹ On 27 October 1997 the government reluctantly followed Thailand and called for assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

When it was allowed a closer look at the workings of the Indonesian economy, the IMF discovered what the currency markets had suspected: the economy was deeply in debt and riddled with corruption. In December 1997 Suharto signed an agreement with the IMF to repeal subsidies and implement reforms, specifically within the unregulated banking sector.¹² Yet on 6 January 1998 in a move MacIntyre described as 'the final straw',¹³ Suharto released a budget that effectively ignored these demands. This triggered renewed loss of confidence. The economy resumed the free fall which the IMF had attempted to offset in December, the rupiah plummeting to Rp11,000 to the US dollar by early January 1998 compared with Rp2,700 in July 1997.¹⁴ The IMF and the international community reacted quickly, as did an increasingly outspoken domestic political opposition. By 12 January, the trade in rupiah quietened in response to positive statements by the IMF and foreign governments in support of Suharto's renewed commitment to reform. As a result of this international and domestic pressure, on 15 January the President signed a new agreement with the IMF, outlining further sweeping reforms including an end to monopolies and subsidies. The signing of this second agreement made international headlines with photographs showing Michel Camdessus, head of the IMF, watching over Suharto with his

arms folded as the President signed. Suharto was humiliated, with his economy in ruins. Having justified authoritarian rule on grounds of economic development, the New Order regime thereby lost the last shreds of legitimacy. On 22 January 1998 the rupiah hit a low of 17,000 to the US dollar, approximately one sixth of its former value.¹⁵

Social conditions became chaotic as people lost all confidence that the government could revive the economy. By mid-January, rumours about shop-owners hoarding food and imminent price rises were causing panic. Shoppers rushed to stock up on basic commodities for fear of national shortages. Adding to these difficulties was the fact that prices for basic goods in Indonesia had lagged behind international levels since devaluation of the rupiah and in January 1998 were still being kept artificially low by the National Distribution Agency (Bulog), bringing severe pressures to bear on producers and traders. Even the government's own conservative estimates predicted that unemployment would reach 13.5 million and underemployment 48.6 million in the coming year.¹⁶ Moreover the incomes of those still employed were not rising in line with inflation, which reached around seventy per cent for food, for the year to May 1998. Given inflation, rising unemployment and little if any wage growth, consumption plummeted. Car sales declined by more than 80 per cent in the year to March 1998.¹⁷ This combination of high inflation and high unemployment was an unusual phenomenon. As Lebaran approached, conditions were predicted to worsen.

A 'CAMPAIGN' OF 'SCAPEGOATING', JANUARY–FEBRUARY 1998

It has been expected that riots would move from East Java, Central Java and finally West Java (Maj. Gen. Djamani, West Java Military Chief).¹⁸

A society finds that something is wrong ... the search for someone or something to blame usually finds what it seeks in available people who may be already disliked but who are inevitably seen as different.¹⁹

The truisms that everything is related to everything else and that every incident is unique are just that: truisms.²⁰

In January 1998, President Suharto and his government had been ridiculed by economists and political observers inside and outside Indonesia for failure to respond to the IMF's earlier demands and for causing the dire

economic situation. Yet, during January and February 1998, outbreaks of social unrest focused mainly on small traders, particularly those of ethnic Chinese descent. As in the past, economic and political turmoil brought an escalation in violence against ethnic Chinese. It was easier to blame traders than the powerful economic forces giving rise to inflation.

In the midst of the economic crisis and increasing social discontent, Chinese Indonesians became the victims of mostly spontaneous violence. Local people accused them of hoarding, their shops were attacked, and they were forced to lower prices. In Java, during the first months of 1998, the violence was described by the mass media and commentators as 'irrational' and 'spontaneous' food riots: acts of displaced aggression in which the search for someone to blame most often led to those considered 'different'.²¹ When ethnic difference was coupled with the economic role played by many Chinese Indonesians, they became an obvious target.²²

In many of the early cases of violence, the participants clearly intended to demand lower prices and force this point if necessary. Nonetheless, as time passed, violence against ethnic Chinese spread across Java and was sustained. A general interpretation of this violence as 'food riots' is therefore inadequate to explain its persistence or why the target was broadened to include places other than food stores.²³ As will be described below, in most cases the attacks were carried out in some organised and systematic manner with deliberate choice of targets. Moreover, events happening nationally were shaping the political context and were explicitly anti-Chinese. A series of national 'events' took place in January and February 1998, which taken together suggest a strong campaign to deflect blame from the government by implicating others in the economic decline — what can be called a process of rational 'scapegoating'.²⁴

Connections can be made between the incidents of violence across Java in January and February. Nevertheless, the violence was not just a sequence of events in response to 'mounting tensions' with prejudice or racism as a 'driving force'. Instead, through re-telling the stories of what happened during January and February in Javanese villages and towns in the context of developments nationally, there emerges a description of the violence, which shows that antipathies, although essential to the outcome, do not on their own explain events.

Horowitz's theory of 'recurrent riots' is useful in explaining why this violence had the appearance of a contagion or wave and also why it became more organised and brutal as time went on.²⁵ Arguably, the

incidents during these months had the same triggers: price rises and the broader economic crisis, exacerbated by provocative government rhetoric and rumour. In explaining how the violence spread, the good communication and transport networks across Java and the movement of huge numbers of people along these routes during the Lebaran holiday period are critical. Imitation, rumour and impunity played a salient role in these events, which saw higher degrees of organisation, brutality and a wider selection of targets as time passed. Further, as the national political context became more and more hostile to Chinese Indonesians, the violence against them was less displaced and more focused. Rather than simply being convenient scapegoats for mob frustration, Chinese Indonesians were increasingly held directly responsible for the crisis.

Economic Frustration Boils Up: Cicadas, Bandung, 5 January 1998

I think the actions of the troops were less than appropriate. Now we are living under emergency conditions. Under these conditions the regional government must be more wise and pro-active in dealing with the public (Prof. Kusnaka Adminiharja, Faculty of Sociology and Politics, Padjadjaran University, Bandung).²⁶

By early January 1998, in the middle of Ramadan there was a tangible sense of impending crisis. On the morning of 5 January the Mayor of West Java's highland city of Bandung called the Army-controlled Team for National Discipline (*Kesatuan Tugas Gerakan Disiplin Nasion, Satgas GDN*) to restore order to Bandung and, specifically, to remove unauthorised street traders from restricted areas of the city. Around mid-afternoon, police vehicles carrying dozens of Satgas GDN troops arrived in the district of Cicadas on Jalan Ahmad Yani. According to city trading laws, traders were required to stay inside the market until 6 p.m.²⁷ However, they had recently been leaving the markets earlier in order to serve customers as they rushed home at dusk to break their fast. One trader explained to a journalist that he was able to make far more than if he stayed inside the market.²⁸ Another added, 'Especially because it is Ramadan, we need money to celebrate Lebaran.'²⁹ The decision taken by the traders in Cicadas to flout city laws intended to keep Bandung 'clean, green and filled with flowers'³⁰ annoyed the authorities. When the troops moved onto Ahmad Yani to remove the traders, eyewitnesses reported that they did so forcefully and aggressively.³¹

The traders reacted by throwing things back at the troops. It was reported that as news spread of the attempts to move the traders, crowds gathered to support them. Eventually outnumbered, the troops retreated as the growing crowd turned their anger to shops along Ahmad Yani, including the Matahari and Horison department stores. Pavements and flowerpots were smashed and rubbish bins set alight. Hundreds of shopwindows were broken and tens of vehicles damaged. Although the police closed off the street, it was at least an hour after the violence began before a full contingent of police and army units arrived. It then began to rain as the call to prayer was sounded. The crowds dispersed.³²

The economic crisis had made it difficult for low-income earners like the street traders to earn a living. The policy of *kebersihan* or cleanliness had been implemented in Indonesia's cities and towns in the more prosperous mid-1990s. This included removing *warung*, traders and *becaks* from the street — all services used or operated by low-income earners. Government predictions of increased unemployment levels were already realised by early January. In the construction sector in West Java alone, it was estimated that 75,000 workers had lost their jobs as the sector contracted by 30 per cent in the period from March 1997 to March 1998.³³ As a consequence, many Indonesians were forced to seek alternative, easily set-up employment and to provide cheap services such as those offered by the street traders. Meanwhile the New Order continued to deny the reality of the looming crisis.

The violence in Bandung involved little direct hostility towards Chinese Indonesians. Its occurrence during Ramadan only partially explains why it took place. This was a spontaneous act of displaced aggression or scapegoating in its most irrational form. The *kaki lima* traders were angered by the troops sent to remove them from the street and frustrated with the city government which gave the order. The Chinese-Indonesian shops along Ahmad Yani bore the brunt of that frustration, but *pribumi* businesses were also attacked. The reaction of some shop-owners in Bandung by scrawling '*pribumi*' or 'Muslim' on their doors said less about the types of targets sought by the protesters than about the expectations these residents had of what the unrest was about.³⁴ When a solution to the violence was sought, it was settled between the authorities and the *kaki lima* traders; Chinese-Indonesian shop-owners were not involved. The local Police Chief was correct to say that this was not like Tasikmalaya or Rengasdengklok.³⁵ However, as the political atmosphere quickly turned against Chinese Indonesians, it was an explanation that in the weeks to come could no longer be applied.

Invoking Anti-Chinese Sentiment, Part I: The ‘I Love the Rupiah’ Campaign

Days after the violence in Bandung and at the height of the stand-off between the IMF and Suharto, the first overt attempt to shift the responsibility for the crisis from Suharto and his government on to external and extra-governmental forces was the *Gerakan Cinta Rupiah* or, ‘I Love Rupiah Movement’. On 8 January 1998, the governor of the Bank of Indonesia, Soedradjad Djiwandono, and the bank’s new directors met Suharto to discuss the currency crisis. Afterwards, Djiwandono commented, ‘We must convince the owners of foreign currency that they [are] not taking the wrong decision by converting their earnings into rupiahs.’³⁶ The following day a group led by Suharto’s daughter, then chair of Golkar’s central executive board, Ny Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana (also known as Tutut), launched the ‘I Love Rupiah’ campaign in an effort to encourage demonstrations of national solidarity through support for the currency. The message was that world currency markets and traders might not value the rupiah but loyal Indonesians certainly did. On that first day, Tutut exchanged US\$50,000 for rupiah and urged other Indonesians to follow suit: ‘We need everyone in society at large and in the government to love the rupiah.’³⁷ Chinese Indonesian business leaders such as Eka Tjipta Widjaja, Liem Sioe Liong and Tomy Winata joined her.³⁸

At carefully organised and well-publicised ceremonies at banks and moneychangers across Jakarta, business leaders, politicians and military officers handed over their US dollars in exchange for rupiah. The nightly national television news captured these transactions, which were presented to the public in such a way that they could easily be mistaken for charitable donations. Indeed, the quick response of these leaders to the call of the ‘I Love Rupiah’ campaign was for the most part symbolic and token. In an editorial in *Suara Pembaruan* on 14 January 1998, the newspaper observed that the movement had appeared to attract great support but in reality only US\$650,000 had been exchanged.³⁹ However, the actual sums of foreign currency exchanged for the national currency was never of primary concern. This campaign was about nationalism and patriotism. The Governor of the Bank of Indonesia himself confirmed that it was not intended as a campaign with any real chance of making monetary impact:

The general objective is a moral movement. From the aspect of restoration of the exchange rate it is not yet certain that it will have

a direct impact. If the currency markets react in London or in New York, this is difficult for us to control.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the search for culprits was focused not only on those outside Indonesia but also upon those within whose loyalty was questionable. Golkar Chairman Harmoko was reported to comment, 'We must find the rat before he spoils the whole of our harvest.'⁴¹ Not surprisingly, some of the first and most 'generous' public figures to participate were Chinese-Indonesian businessmen. Suharto called a meeting of big business owners, known as conglomerates — a term associated with ethnic Chinese — about this time, at which he discussed the issue of capital flight and national loyalty.⁴²

Price Rises: The Government's Failure to Stop Speculation

I would do anything to feed my wife and children ... I would go to war, killing those people who have caused me trouble (Lukiman, resident Central Java).⁴³

Meanwhile, there was growing panic among the public about the potential for drastic price rises and vital products to disappear from markets. Whilst official data show that the price of rice increased by more than 11 per cent in February, unofficial reports claimed this was in some places almost 100 per cent. This meant a huge loss of real income as wages failed to rise with inflation. In an effort to allay public fears, in mid-January the Attorney General threatened that those found hoarding would be tried under the Anti-Subversion laws for jeopardising national security.⁴⁴ With little regard for basic economics, the head of the National Distribution Agency (*Badan Urusan Logistik*, Bulog) insisted that there was no reason for price increases for basic commodities and that the national stocks were sufficient to cover the market demands. He warned traders not to speculate with prices and asked people not to panic.⁴⁵ Subsidiary of the National Distribution Agency's the Logistic Depot (Dulog) launched 'Operation Market', *operasi pasar*, a programme of random visits by its officials to markets to check prices, and also 'Operation Intelligence', *operasi intelijen*, to find the 'brains' behind the price hikes in an attempt to assure the people that prices were under control. With inflation at its highest levels in a decade — over 50 per cent in February 1998 — Bulog's insistence on holding down official prices while the prices of other farming commodities rose meant that farmers, particularly in Java, faced severe reductions in their real incomes.⁴⁶

Rather than calming the public, the government's statements simply encouraged people to believe that the traders themselves were responsible for the price rises and the disappearance of products from markets. The authorities presented an impression of normality in the markets and failed to explain the reasons for the stresses in the economy, thereby rendering the public confused and increasingly frustrated. Meanwhile, Bulog admitted it had imported 1.5 million tons of rice from around the Southeast Asian region — due to a drought-induced shortfall in the last harvest — on government credits, whilst still denying responsibility for price pressures. Anti-hoarding threats and military-style operations were inadequate measures at a time of increasing panic and frequent violent attacks on suppliers. The government's public explanations for the monetary crisis and the price rises by way of easy nationalistic slogans, deflected blame onto external and 'uncontrollable' factors in the international and local economies. Unsurprisingly, the government failed to assure the public that a food shortage would not be accompanied by massive price rises. Protests erupting into violence broke out across the country, particularly on Java, with a focus on Chinese-Indonesian businesses trading in basic products.

Riots in East Java, 12–16 January 1998: Motorcycle Convoys, Farmers and Price Rises

In this climate of high anxiety, parts of East Java including the inland city of Jember and its surrounds were gripped by violence from 12–16 January 1998. The threats made by Bulog and the Attorney General against traders raising prices without permission and hoarding goods, began to be taken up by the people, most of them farmers, in the Jember region. Armed with what they saw as an authorisation from these agencies, people embarked on their own campaign, both organised and spontaneous, of enforcing these rulings in their local area. Hotman Siahaan described it: 'The masses forced traders to sell rice at a price that was in line with the prices set by the Logistics Depot and not for their own self-interest. By using force to cause prices to be lowered, the people acted in the style of Robin Hood.'⁴⁷ A typical example took place on 12 January 1998 in the village of Lengkong in Mumbulsari district about 20 kilometres from Jember, where shop-owners had increased the prices for basic goods above the Bulog price of Rp1,000 per kilogram.⁴⁸ Crowds gathered at stores and attempted to force the traders to reconsider their decision. When shopkeepers refused, the crowds attacked their

shops, looted produce and set the stores alight. In a few cases, protesters succeeded in forcing traders to sell their products at the *harga biasa* or 'normal price' set by Bulog, even though, as one trader told the media, 'If I buy and sell at these prices, I will die.'⁴⁹

The initial action carried out in villages around the Jember district was mostly spontaneous. However, its dynamic soon shifted, taking on a more organised form. On 13 January a convoy of an estimated one thousand people on motorcycles and trucks called at villages around Banyuwangi, East Java, protesting against unfair prices. It was claimed that a television programme screened a few days earlier about Bulog's commitment to maintaining prices triggered this reaction.⁵⁰ In towns visited by the convoy, protesters and large crowds of locals regularly outnumbered security and there was violence against Chinese-Indonesian stores and warehouses.

Authorities responded with conspiracy theories. East Java Police Chief, Zarwan Djamaan, argued that 'intellectual leaders' were behind the violence with the aim of creating instability. They were portrayed as having taken advantage of the rising discontent among farmers around Jember who viewed the discrepancy between what they received for their product and what the shop-owner sold it for as an injustice. Conversely, the Governor of East Java, Basofi Soedirman, attempted to calm the people and in part to reverse the messages being issued from Jakarta. Basofi insisted that the few shop-owners storing basic goods were not intentionally hoarding. Instead he commended them for acting responsibly by keeping some products aside so that a constant supply would be available. He called on the people to consider the implications of their actions. So as not to apportion too much responsibility to his constituents, he speculated, 'The manner of these figures, that is to mobilise the people in order to do problem actions, indicates PKI [communists].'⁵¹

Media reports indicated that most people involved in the violence in Jember and its surrounds came from the 'interior' or, in other words, they were farmers.⁵² The farmers' plight became acute with devaluation-induced rises in the price of petrol, essential for their existence and work in the village. This blow came in addition to a severe drought, which meant that the harvest would be delayed for months. Their frustration in the face of what they perceived to be and were repeatedly told were unlawful price increases and hoarding easily led to sometimes violent protests against the most obvious target, Chinese-Indonesian traders, whose agency was implicit and undeniable. The origins of the motorcycle

convoy are less clear. Authorities described them as ‘youths’, who, it appears, were working to a plan. Whether their intention was a peaceful protest or not is difficult to tell, but violence occurred in each town they visited. This also makes it difficult to explain why security forces did not act to stop the convoy until the third day and why, when eventually they did act, it was with a level of aggression and violence completely out of proportion.⁵³

During this period, farmers and other local people whose lives were in crisis had apparently not yet associated the government’s control of prices with their difficulties. Until now, they had responded to the rhetoric from Jakarta about the price rises and accordingly directed their protest to local traders. Such incidents fell within Horowitz’s definition of food riots: ‘generally motivated by hunger and indignation about price and supply, the riots were not so much destructive as they were appropriative’.⁵⁴ The objective was to force prices down, and in most cases little more than looting resulted. As time passed and no resolution to the price increases was forthcoming from the government, stores closed in response to threats. People became more desperate. The government became more aware also, that it would not be long before it was itself implicated in the economic crisis.

Invoking Anti-Chinese Sentiment, Part II: Sofyan Wanandi and the Tanah Tinggi Bomb

On 18 January 1998 a homemade bomb exploded inside an apartment in Tanah Tinggi, Central Jakarta. The apartment was leased by two young men, both active members of the banned political party, the People’s Democratic Party (PRD), branded communist by the New Order government soon after it was formed in 1996.⁵⁵ When police investigated the scene, they discovered a laptop computer, from which it is alleged they recovered emails and other documents. The authorities claimed that one of these emails mentioned well-known Chinese-Indonesian businessman, Sofyan Wanandi (Liem Bian Koen), head of the Gemala group of companies and once a close confidant of the President.⁵⁶ Wanandi had been a member of the 1966 Movement (the Angkatan ’66), which organised mass demonstrations against the Communist Party (PKI) and facilitated the establishment of the New Order government. Authorities claimed that the email stated that Wanandi had been approached with a request to fund the party’s activities. The Jakarta elite meanwhile were perplexed by claims that Wanandi, until

recently very close to the New Order and a well known anti-communist, would have anything to do with the PRD.⁵⁷

On 26 January, Wanandi was called in for questioning by the Chief of the Jakarta branch of the Regional Agency for the Coordination of Support for the Development of National Stability (Bakorstanasda), Maj. Gen. Syafrie Sjamsoeddin, to answer the allegations, which he categorically denied.⁵⁸ Wanandi then held a press conference at which he chose to speak in English as well as Indonesian, strongly refuting the claims made against him and urging people to resist apportioning blame to any group. He stressed his commitment to helping the country overcome its economic problems and denied that his company was sending money offshore.⁵⁹ A few days after his meeting with Sjamsoeddin, Wanandi departed for Australia. Rumours were once again rife and this time more fervent.⁶⁰ Suddenly Jakarta's elite and the public at large began to wonder if these claims might have some substance: had Wanandi fled Indonesia out of fear, and what did he have to hide?

During the week Wanandi was out of the country, the Tanah Tinggi investigation continued and speculation flourished, not only about Wanandi's alleged involvement and that of his brother Jusuf but also about Chinese Indonesians in general and their role in the economic collapse. Amongst other rumours circulating was the claim that, before the collapse of the rupiah, Chinese Indonesians had moved about US\$60 billion out of Indonesia, thereby precipitating the currency's collapse.⁶¹ On 2 February the Directorate General of Immigration announced that Wanandi had been asked to remain in Indonesia due to his connection to the Tanah Tinggi investigation, although admitting that a travel ban had not been issued.⁶² On 4 February at a prayer gathering at Army headquarters, Gen. Feisal Tanjung commented on Wanandi's absence and openly questioned his patriotism: 'Does he want to be called first so that he won't go? If he is a good citizen, he must be in Indonesia.'⁶³ The issue received avid media attention. Stories speculating about where Wanandi had gone and when he would return were featured daily. The weekly magazine *Gatra* ran Wanandi's picture or name on its cover over four consecutive editions from 31 January until 21 February 1998.⁶⁴ When he returned from Australia on 8 February, Wanandi was immediately called to the Jakarta Regional Police headquarters.⁶⁵ Police maintained that he was appearing only as a witness under a different investigation to that carried out by the Bakorstanasda on 26 January. Wanandi was again forced to defend his actions.⁶⁶

Why Sofyan Wanandi?

At face value, the accusation that Wanandi backed the PRD is absurd. The two are as politically incompatible as Bill Clinton and Saddam Hussein (Heryanto).⁶⁷

Though Wanandi had been a member of the 1966 movement, which supported Suharto against the PKI and assistant to Suharto's economic advisor from 1967–74, in more recent times his relationship with the New Order had been less close.⁶⁸ Together with an increasing number of commentators and business people, since the beginning of the economic crisis he had regularly engaged in public dialogue on economic issues and policy. As early as October 1997, Wanandi and other business leaders had called on the government to act to loosen monetary policy and embrace the IMF reforms: 'The IMF has some strong but effective medicine for our economic ills. We must give priority to the national interest and set aside our private ambitions for the moment.'⁶⁹ In the initial stages of the monetary crisis (*krismon*), it seems that his opinions were well regarded by the government. He and other conglomerate owners were closely involved in decision-making on economic policy. As late as 13 January, Wanandi, Liem Sioe Liong (Sudono Salim), Anthony Salim, Eka Tjipta Widjaja and others met as representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (*Kamar Dagang dan Industri*: Kadin) with the governor of the Bank of Indonesia and some cabinet members to work towards a solution.⁷⁰ During this meeting, Wanandi did not disguise the fact that his opinions on repairing the economy differed from those of the government, which was increasingly hostile to IMF reforms.⁷¹ This was not the first time that he had expressed an opposing view. In an interview with *Gatra* magazine immediately after the Tanah Tinggi bombing and before he visited Australia, Wanandi stated that he would not be exchanging his dollars for rupiah, viewing it as no real solution: 'If \$1000 or \$2000 is considered good for us, I will send it tomorrow. But it is my opinion that what can be done to improve the economy is to get much more dollar investment from overseas, not just \$1000–\$2000.'⁷² Instead he believed that creating economic and political stability would be far more effective. Such opinions were strongly rejected by those close to Suharto. Again Gen. Feisal Tanjung was among them: 'Already 13 conglomerates have said they are prepared to help, except for Sofyan who is not prepared to contribute to the government so that we may overcome the crisis.'⁷³

Wanandi's outspokenness did not take place in a vacuum. Early 1998 saw increasing confidence among Indonesian democrats and

intellectuals to present dissenting opinions about the way the nation was being governed. In addition to expressing his opinions on economic issues, in early January Wanandi hesitantly entered a political dialogue on the appointment of the Vice President. He argued that the critical economic situation made desirable an early announcement to avoid speculation and uncertainty that would further upset the economy.⁷⁴ In response to a journalist's question about the suitability of Gen. Try Sutrisno for another term, he responded, 'I consider Try Sutrisno as extremely ideal for the position of Vice President for the coming leadership term because he can be accepted by all sides.' This was widely understood to be a rejection of Suharto's preferred candidate, B.J. Habibie, who as Minister for Technology overspent on big projects and did not have the confidence of world markets.⁷⁵ Just days after Suharto announced his intention to stand for President again and nominated Habibie for Vice President, world currency markets further devalued the rupiah to its lowest point. Many believed that Wanandi's comments regarding the vice-presidency were inseparable from his subsequent alleged implication in the Tanah Tinggi bomb incident, which occurred only days afterwards.⁷⁶

Why was Sofyan Wanandi, who was generally conservative, singled out by the government and the Army for condemnation, particularly at a time of wide dissenting opinion? Wanandi himself concluded that it was an event designed to single out an ethnic Chinese for blame and for accusations of disloyalty to the nation during its time of crisis.⁷⁷ Heryanto explained: 'Demonising Wanandi exclusively on the basis of his Chinese ethnicity would not be adequately forceful in 1998, and thus an alleged association with the already prosecuted PRD was established.'⁷⁸ The scandal involving Wanandi, a high-profile Chinese Indonesian who was also a conglomerate owner (and therefore the worst kind of ethnic Chinese in the eyes of many Indonesians), fulfilled the government's need for a decoy. A fitting analogy about the usefulness of a minority as a scapegoat, which applies in this situation, is that it acts as 'a kind of political methadone' in times of trouble for the elite or the community as a whole.⁷⁹

Riots in East and Central Java, 26 January–3 February: Frustrated Fishermen and a Lean Lebaran

From 26–30 January 1998, violent incidents took place along the 100-kilometre stretch of the north Java coast from Rembang to Tuban. Fishing is the primary industry for the towns and villages along this

coast, whose highway is a key road link between the main ports of Semarang and Surabaya. These incidents occurred at the beginning of the Lebaran holiday, which for Muslims marks the end of the fasting month. Traditionally, this is when Indonesians visit family and return to their hometowns and villages, so that roads and transport systems across the country are at their busiest.⁸⁰ The violence began on the evening of 26 January in the town of Kragan, Rembang district, and continued in villages along this coast for two days. On the first day, a large crowd of mainly fishermen, came to Kragan from nearby villages to protest about a threefold rise in the price of kerosene. The protest became violent, and the crowds attacked shops, burned produce in the streets and looted. Similar violence the next day in nearby Sarang was described as more brutal than the day before. Violence spreading east along the coast disrupted traffic on the busy Semarang–Surabaya road.⁸¹ From 28–30 January there were violent incidents in various locations in Tuban district.⁸² Police arrested 131 suspects and Rp139 million worth of damage was done to shops, stock and vehicles.

When the East Java Governor, Basofi Soedirman, was called to comment on the violence in his district for the second time in as many weeks, this time his response was more forceful. He agreed with police that the violence had been organised and again urged residents to resist provocation to join in: 'I appeal to rumour-mongers to stop their campaigns because what they have been doing has caused the nation a lot of pain. It's a big sin to agitate (people to riot).'⁸³ Generally, however, responses by authorities during and after the unrest were far from strong enough to quell the now widespread belief that such violence could proceed with impunity.

Unlike the violence around Jember in mid-January, the incidents two weeks later in Rembang and Tuban districts were not small, isolated or spontaneous outbreaks or 'food riots' demanding price increases. Although consisting largely of disgruntled fishermen and other frustrated locals, the crowds of protesters were also organised to some extent. They involved large numbers, described as in the hundreds and even thousands, some of whom had travelled from surrounding areas. The targets were seldom random; protesters moved directly to kerosene traders and fishing supplies stores. They were more brutal than those around Jember. In addition to threats against shop-owners and the breaking of windows, there was large-scale burning and looting. Participants acted with increasing levels of confidence, safe in the

knowledge that there would be no serious repercussions from the authorities. An attack on a Catholic church in Kragan similarly indicated that the targets were becoming more diverse.⁸⁴ Police uncovered evidence of mass meetings held to organise the protests, and of key individuals, named as criminals, acting as coordinators.⁸⁵ Amongst these was an Army intelligence officer suspected of coordinating the violence, thus giving weight to suspicions that the military and the government played a role in this violence, not only from afar but also at grassroots level.⁸⁶

Further east and hundreds of kilometres from the districts of Rembang and Tuban, the town of Pasuruan became the scene of mass violence three days later, with the trigger once again an increase in the price of kerosene. As in Jember nearly two weeks before, a convoy of motorcycles entered the town just prior to violence breaking out.⁸⁷ These acts of large-scale violence were no longer just a form of economic protest; they were more destructive and included new targets. The burning of goods that might otherwise have been looted also demonstrated that the livelihood aims expressed in earlier protests could no longer be applied.⁸⁸

Invoking Anti-Chinese Sentiment, Part III: Islamic Groups Spread the Word

The Muslim community also has to become aware, aware that power in this country cannot fall into the hands of Zionist agents or groups who have a phobia toward Islam (*Conspiracy to Overthrow Soeharto*).⁸⁹

There's no grip on the situation to prevent local conflict from becoming a national conflict (Marzuki Darusman).⁹⁰

As the crisis escalated through January, various Islamic groups were also sending clear signals about whom they considered to be the culprits in the economic collapse. During Ramadan, *ulama* in mosques around the country called on their audience to 'take back the wealth that was rightfully theirs'.⁹¹ Some, particularly Chinese Indonesians, who heard the sermons broadcast across their neighbourhoods took them to be accusatory statements against ethnic Chinese and calls to violence. In January 1998 Sofyan Wanandi wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald*: 'There are a lot of speeches in the mosques saying that the Chinese are bringing the economy down. This is very dangerous; they are just trying to make us scapegoats.'⁹²

On 23 January 1998 Gen. Prabowo Subianto, recently appointed Commander of the Special Command Unit (Komando Pasukan Khusus, Kopassus) and Suharto's son-in-law, hosted a *buka puasa* or breaking of the fast at his headquarters, to which he invited around 5,000 Muslim clerics and activists with links, among others, to ICMI and the more radical KISDI, including its notorious leader Ahmad Soemargono.⁹³ At the meeting Prabowo distributed a booklet titled *Conspiracy to Overthrow Soeharto* which argued, 'The reason President Soeharto had been targeted ... was that he was a Muslim, and he and his family were becoming too powerful for the cabal of Jews, Jesuits, Chinese and CIA-Mossad agents who control international capitalism.'⁹⁴ Robert Hefner explains that the book 'painted a picture of a vile domestic and international conspiracy against Soeharto' and its authors were, he argues, to be found among those active in the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), previously known as the Centre for Policy and Development Studies (CPDS), both pro-Habibie think-tanks supported by the likes of Gen. Feisal Tanjung, Lt. Gen. Syarwan Hamid and Prabowo, along with Suharto's children Tutut and Bambang. Among the claims that Hefner describes as 'absurd', the book alleges that Ibu Tien (Suharto's late wife) had been murdered by a Chinese doctor as part of a conspiracy led by the aforementioned groups. This and similar claims led Hefner to judge that 'the booklet's anti-Chinese and anti-Christian rhetoric was the most hateful the Soeharto regime had ever used'. Hefner also points out that the booklet was put on the KISDI website at this time, therefore reaching a far wider audience.⁹⁵

In late January and early February, soon after the Kopassus *buka puasa*, various Islamic groups became active in demonstrations against Wanandi, which were also explicitly anti-Chinese. Demonstrations were held at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a prominent Indonesian think-tank on economics and politics, headed by Wanandi's brother, Jusuf.⁹⁶ Long regarded as an organisation of Catholic Chinese Indonesians, the CSIS had enjoyed close relations with the New Order government until Suharto's shift towards more Islamic policies in the early 1990s. The demonstrations were organised by a variety of Islamic youth groups, the most prominent being KISDI, which had close associations with ICMI and was widely seen as a radical group 'for hire', with links to state intelligence networks and Kopassus through its then commander, Prabowo.⁹⁷ The protesters demanded that Wanandi answer the claims against him and made anti-Christian and anti-Chinese statements.⁹⁸ The demonstrations at CSIS continued for days, ending

only after the leaders of the think-tank called their own friends in the military.⁹⁹ However, similar protests continued elsewhere.

On 2 February demonstrators calling themselves the 'Extended Family of the Victims of the Tanjung Priok Incident' and led by relatives of Amir Biki, a Muslim cleric killed during the 1984 Tanjung Priok incident, went to the national parliament to demand a decrease in the price of basic goods and the prosecution of Wanandi and the Chinese-Indonesian millionaire, Liem Sioe Liong.¹⁰⁰ As mentioned earlier, in bombings following the deaths at Tanjung Priok in 1984, the first target was a branch of the Bank of Central Asia, owned by Liem, described as the 'principal *cukong* in the New Order'.¹⁰¹ Rusly Biki, leader of the group and son of the cleric, claimed that there was a link between these issues: 'Both the House and security authorities should take measures against them. Indonesian people, mostly Muslims, are severely affected by the price hikes the businessmen have sparked.'¹⁰²

In addition to these protest actions, demonstrators targeted anyone critical of their campaign against Wanandi.¹⁰³ On 6 February, the Islamic youth group 'Front of the Islamic Youth Action of Greater Jakarta', allegedly backed by prominent KISDI leader Fadli Zon, held demonstrations outside the offices of the popular weekly magazine *D&R Romantika* to protest against an article it had published entitled 'The Sofyan Wanandi Case: Who Knows Where He Is?'.¹⁰⁴ The group argued that the article defended Wanandi and CSIS and was insulting to Muslim youth.¹⁰⁵ Groups also demonstrated at the offices of the newspaper *Media Indonesia*, which had published an editorial suggesting that the allegations against Wanandi had been fabricated by the military. It was perhaps no coincidence that the Army also questioned its editor in relation to the Tanah Tinggi incident.¹⁰⁶

On 8 February these anti-Chinese statements and actions by Muslim groups reached a climax. A Great Meeting was held in the national Al-Azhar Mosque in Jakarta, at which *ulama* and leaders of Muslim organisations from across Java made speeches about the economic crisis, its causes and consequences and pointed fingers of blame. Speakers were united in calling for the people to rise and resist the 'new colonialists' and 'traitors' who, they argued, had plundered the wealth of the people.¹⁰⁷ In a speech titled 'Strategy of the Muslim Struggle in Facing Present Developments', KH Abdul Qadir Djaelani said, 'Let us close the ranks of Islam and ABRI [the Army] to face those who destroy the national economic system and create instability.' Bambang Pribadi, head of the National Solidarity Front of Indonesian Muslims, added

this statement about his followers' intentions: 'They join to face traitors of the nation like Sofyan Wanandi or whoever stands behind him.'¹⁰⁸ Representatives of the military were also present. Lt. Gen. Syarwan Hamid used Golkar Chairman Harmoko's earlier catch-cry to 'eradicate rats' in the economy, reportedly saying, 'These rats took away the fruits of our national development and work for their own self interest.... Don't think that the people do not know who these rats are. It's time to eliminate these rats.'¹⁰⁹

'Holy War' Declared: A Common Agenda

Two days later on 10 February, Muslim leaders of the Indonesian Council of Muslim teachers and leaders (MUI) met with President Suharto during a break from their annual national meeting. Suharto urged them to offset unrest in Indonesia by staying alert to events that might provoke the people. He told them, 'Keep on praying, use the mosques and smaller prayer houses, even for just a few minutes, to remind the people to stay alert. Stay alert, because there are (currently) so many efforts to instigate (unrest).'¹¹⁰ Maintaining the religious overtone, Suharto attacked 'certain' unnamed business people for bringing about the economic crisis through speculation: 'This is a game that would never receive the blessing of God.' When the MUI leaders returned to their meeting, they affirmed their support for Suharto's re-election as President. On behalf of its members, MUI chairman Hasan Basri urged the government to take steps towards reducing the wealth gap by forming a people's economy and supporting *pribumi* business.¹¹¹ Furthermore, Basri embraced Suharto's call for vigilance against hoarders and speculators. He issued a call for *jihad nasional*, or a national holy war, against currency speculators and hoarders of basic commodities and urged *ulama* to 'defend the nation from attack from within the nation and outside it'.¹¹²

Other Islamic groups quickly acted to counter this discourse, warning that it was being used as a political tool with potentially dire consequences. Masdar F. Mas'udi, director of the Indonesian Society for *Pesantren* and Community Development (*Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat*, P3M), rejected Basri's assertions that the holy war could be carried out peacefully, arguing that use of the religious term *jihad* was employed precisely because it could easily incite Muslims.¹¹³ A week later, at a Muhammadiyah meeting in Yogyakarta attended by 40,000 people, its leader Amien Rais also denounced the calls for holy war against hoarders and declared that looting and burning were against

Islamic teaching.¹¹⁴ He explicitly condemned the attacks on Chinese Indonesians: 'The Chinese are our brothers and they have become a part and parcel of this integrated nation.' He instructed, '(The protesters) have to direct their anger and protests at the government as the government must be held responsible for this messy situation.'¹¹⁵ The head of the Indonesian Movement of Islamic Students (*Pengerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*, PMII), C. Umam Wiranu, warned, 'Heaven forbid that because of lack of information, the Islamic community directly attacked the Chinese. This is what we are concerned about.'¹¹⁶ As Hefner argues, the more outrageous the hardline Muslim position became, the stronger was the Muslim democrats' opposition to Suharto.¹¹⁷ They were in no doubt that elite political forces were at play.

Up to this point, the government had said or done very little to discourage violence and ethnic tension. One gesture was made on 28 January, at the start of Lebaran, when Suharto met with Protestant Church leaders from the Indonesian Communion of Churches. He asked that all religious leaders call for calm.¹¹⁸ Reports continued, however, from the scenes of violence across Java and on other islands, of military and police standing by while mostly Chinese-Indonesian property, and churches were destroyed. Secretary General of ICMI, Adi Sasono, made ambiguous statements. When journalists asked why non-indigenous Indonesians had been targeted, Sasono replied that they were being made scapegoats for popular anger towards the government and that most of them were poor people. Then added, 'The rich ones are probably already in Singapore'.¹¹⁹ In early February, Chairman of the Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM), Marzuki Darusman, expressed concern at the number of violent incidents with SARA or ethnic 'tendencies' and promised an investigation. He called on the authorities to act strongly to halt the violence, saying that recent statements made by government and the military, in particular, could be interpreted as condoning it, or at least indicating a willingness to look the other way.¹²⁰

The Army and 'Radical Groups'

That's untrue We don't indulge in diversion acts (Army spokesman Brig. Gen. A. Wahab Mokodongan).¹²¹

With neither words nor action from the President, military leaders and some members of government proved more forthcoming in their

almost uniform responses. Comments stressed what they repeatedly referred to as ‘radical’ or ‘suspicious’ groups in society who threatened to destabilise the nation. They re-emphasised the commitment of the Armed Forces to protect the people during a time of uncertainty.

Interestingly, an almost lone voice for peace from within the New Order regime was that of Gen. Wiranto, then Army Chief of Staff.¹²² At an awards ceremony in Bandung two days after the meeting in the Great Mosque, he advised people not to be incited by SARA issues. ‘Our nation is a large nation and can develop because of the rewards of uniting different ethnic groups, religions and races into one whole union. Do not ruin this for the sake of narrow self-interests.’¹²³ Wiranto also urged the people to remember the national creed, which embraced difference, and to ignore attempts to create social unrest: ‘The situation now is not too troubled. However, there are certain sides that are trying to spread this issue to the people, in order to create divisions. So, consider these issues only as rubbish.’¹²⁴ Wiranto’s words proved to be the exception, as the discourse of accusation and fear mongering became a convenient tool of the elite. The Commander of Greater Jakarta, Maj. Gen. Syafrie Sjamoeeddin, used it to justify increasing security forces in the Jakarta area,¹²⁵ and the Minister for Home Affairs, Yogie S.M., helped to raise the level of social panic: ‘They always try to spark social unrest to test the security authorities and law enforcement bodies. It may be a snowballing movement that can pose a threat to the general session of the People’s Consultative Assembly.’¹²⁶ Outgoing Commander of the Armed Forces, Gen. Feisal Tanjung, warned on numerous occasions that political motives aimed at undermining the government’s credibility and forcing a leadership change were behind the violence. Despite the Army’s confidence that subversive groups existed, none, except for individuals involved in localised violence, were ever detained. It is perhaps no surprise to find that some elites were involved in the fabrication of rumour and speculation themselves. Tanjung reportedly advised journalists and editors to write stories critical of the ethnic Chinese.¹²⁷ Since mid-January, he and other military leaders such as Lt. Gen. Syarwan Hamid, both with connections to KISDI and other radical Islamic groups, had publicly accused Chinese Indonesians of hoarding and moving their money offshore. Together, government institutions and sections of the Islamic community were, as Hefner describes, laying the groundwork for ‘a campaign of violence and intimidation’.¹²⁸

Religious Festivals Collide: Someone Has to Give

(I)t is in the context of a living present that the future is constituted by an anticipation of the other events that are likely to follow (Veena Das).¹²⁹

This 'groundwork' was designed for impact at a time of severe economic and social suffering. In a year when the most important seasons for both the Muslim and ethnic Chinese communities — Lebaran also known as Idul Fitri (end of fasting month) and Chinese New Year — coincided, meant this was potentially such a time. The way in which state law and order agencies 'mark' or represent a particular time or place as 'dangerous' or 'prone' to violence — as with the period when Chinese New Year and Lebaran coincide — means that these discourses are often self-fulfilling.¹³⁰ As communal conflicts in South Asia demonstrate, conflicting temporalities in different religions can be seen to lead to conflict; so too the sources of conflict often lie in elite discourse. In what Roberts¹³¹ would see as an act by the state of 'marking' this time as potentially dangerous, the government insisted that there was greater risk if Chinese New Year celebrations were allowed to occur in 1998. 'We are afraid that if there were celebrations they could spark jealousy in some people', explained a government official. 'The tougher action is needed because of what is happening nowadays. People could easily get angry over trivial things.'¹³² 'Marking' a particular time as prone to violence relates to the idea that the memory of violence itself perpetuates violence. The 'memories' provide the context, a set of behavioural patterns or habitus, necessary to perform such an act.¹³³ These memories are formed not only from personal experience, but also through images seen on the television and stories transmitted through radio and increasingly the Internet.

Given, however, that Chinese New Year celebrations had been banned since 1967, in light of current tensions, it was extremely unlikely that festivities would take place in 1998. As one Chinese Indonesian admitted, 'I really don't think too many of us were going to venture out over the period anyway. Some of us are looking at getting to Singapore for that time. By the sounds of it that would be best for everyone.'¹³⁴ The government's decision to re-state the ban on Chinese New Year in 1998 not only acknowledged the high level of anti-Chinese sentiment and its potential to tip over into violence, but also revealed how the state utilised a 'fear of disruption' during this time as a 'weapon in the competition for symbolic space'.¹³⁵ There were few precedents of Chinese

cultural and religious celebrations causing inter-religious or inter-ethnic conflict. Yet the language used by the New Order mythologised the potential for such minority festivals to induce conflict with the *pribumi* majority and to disrupt inter-ethnic and religious harmony.

At no point did the government condemn the anti-Chinese sentiment that prompted this position. On the contrary, the message being reinforced was that the rights of Chinese Indonesians as a minority should always be subordinated to those of the majority, and that they should be the recipients of the government's 'tough action'. The response of the Chinese Indonesian quoted above indicates the extent to which they were conditioned to accept such remarks without challenge, to the point where this man at least was willing to concede it was the 'best for everyone'.

Violence in Central and West Java, 12–16 February 1998

We have found (that) some people we arrested for allegedly inciting riots came from Jakarta. They arrived here along with the exodus of Idul Fitri revellers (Governor Nuriana).¹³⁶

As many Indonesians prepared to return home from visiting family during Lebaran, for four days in mid-February 1998, a large part of west and central Java came to a standstill as a crippling strike by bus drivers closed down major north-south (between Brebes and Cilacap) and east-west (from Pamanukan-Tegal) routes. Violence stemming from protests about price increases had become frequent in Java since January. In mid-February, the protests took up a broader range of issues. Upon returning home after Lebaran, many factory and construction workers found they had joined the rising number of newly unemployed. This loss was even more acute because most had not received the traditional annual bonus given to workers at Lebaran.¹³⁷ On top of this, in February alone, prices for basic goods rose a further 13 per cent. For many newly unemployed workers, the instructions heard in sermons to 'take back what is rightfully yours' made a strong impact, particularly combined with constant warnings from the government and military of threats from 'mysterious sources'.

News of the violence spread along the transport networks by word of mouth as people moved about during this hectic time of year, as well as by the media. Under these fluid conditions, the violence from 12–16 February was 'contagious' in nature.¹³⁸ As a policeman described

at the time: 'They (the people) hear that a riot has occurred in city A and then there will be a riot in city B.'¹³⁹ Although the violence appeared to be more or less spontaneous, caused by frustration and spurred on by rumour and imitation, after a month it became more focused and organised. Comments in mid-February by the West Java Military Commander, admitting that mass violence was expected, revealed that it also had a method.¹⁴⁰ In this tense atmosphere, the presence of a few actors intent on antagonising and encouraging already frustrated people led easily to unstoppable violence.¹⁴¹

A wave of violence began on 12 February in Jatiwangi near Cirebon on Java's north coast, when becak drivers and labourers protested on the Bandung–Cirebon highway, over the higher prices of basic goods and spare parts.¹⁴² Hundreds attacked vehicle showrooms and shops selling motor vehicle parts, dragging stock outside and burning it.¹⁴³ More than 40 buildings and numerous vehicles were damaged. Reports again mentioned the presence of a group of motorcyclists who incited the crowd with anti-government slogans.¹⁴⁴

On the same day in Losari on the north coast road between Cirebon and Brebes, people attacked shops and looted household items such as soap, oil and sugar, declaring, 'We are not stealing.'¹⁴⁵ 'We are angry because of the price increases; the Chinese own the shops and they are putting up the prices.'¹⁴⁶ The *Jakarta Post* reported that those involved in the violence paused for Friday prayers around midday, returning later to continue their rampage in greater numbers.¹⁴⁷ The violence continued for most of the day, unhindered by what appeared to be sympathetic security forces. When later these same forces used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the crowds, two people were killed and many wounded.¹⁴⁸

Some of the most violent incidents occurred on 13 February in the prosperous West Java town of Pamanukan, on the north coast of Java, not far east of Jakarta.¹⁴⁹ That morning a crowd entered Jalan Kertadibrata for what witnesses testified began as a street protest after rumours that cooking oil was being sold in Bandung for Rp4000 per litre, compared to the local price of Rp6000.¹⁵⁰ Residents and shop-owners in the town were evidently shocked by the outbreak of violence. However, it appears that there was warning of the potential for trouble, as most shops were closed well before the violence began and many Chinese Indonesians had sought refuge at the police station.¹⁵¹ Those involved in the Pamanukan violence quickly focused their attention on Chinese-Indonesian businesses, leaving *pribumi*-owned shops untouched. The crowd shouted slogans

including 'Kill the Chinese'.¹⁵² Graffiti scrawled on boarded shop fronts blared: 'Chinese out', 'Stupid greedy Chinese' and, 'The crisis is the Chinese shop owners' fault'.¹⁵³ Outside a hotel they demanded, 'This is not yours, it is ours'.¹⁵⁴ Chinese Indonesian women reported that jewellery was ripped from their necks and wrists as they fled their homes. Four of the five churches in Pamanukan were destroyed. Residents later claimed that relations between ethnic Chinese, who constituted ten per cent of the local population, and the rest of Pamanukan, had always been harmonious due high levels of integration.¹⁵⁵

The general sentiment expressed by perpetrators and onlookers alike was that the violence and looting in Pamanukan and elsewhere were justified because economic suffering and frustration had reached breaking point. Participants insisted that they were not stealing: they were simply taking what was rightly theirs as indigenous Indonesians and Muslims. News of violence in one village quickly led to more elsewhere, as the people recognised that they would probably not be stopped. Given the signals coming from the centre and the encouragement of local agitators, people believed the political and religious elite had given them a mandate for controlled violence.

The Role of Bus Drivers: Riots Recede

The strike by bus drivers in West and Central Java beginning on 15 February acted as a circuit breaker to the overtly racialised violence seen in Pamanukan. From this point, the nature, form and context of the violence shifted from the issues of price increases and economic frustration at the local level to become violence born of frustration at the very effects of the protest and with less focused targets.¹⁵⁶ Violence broke out simply because large numbers of passengers were stranded by a bus strike which, ironically, was partially if not completely due to the drivers' fear of being attacked by rioters.¹⁵⁷ Violence thus created further violence. The response of the security authorities was merely to warn that it was 'better not to be in crowded places'.¹⁵⁸ Such statements coupled with inaction to prevent it suggested that security forces believed violence to be inevitable.

Roads between Brebes and Bandung and from the terminal town of Purwokerto were at a virtual standstill. The role played by the bus drivers is crucial to understanding the changing nature of the violence in West and Central Java. Transport routes from Jakarta criss-cross this small part of the island, straddling the border of these provinces.

Before the strike along their routes, bus drivers spread news and rumours to each other and to their passengers about the price of goods in one town compared to another. Through this network of communications, word that the price of spare parts had risen by 150 per cent or that rice was half the price in another town travelled quickly, as did news of violence elsewhere. Ironically the strike created new frustrations. The dissatisfaction grew to include would-be-passengers stranded at major terminals like Purwokerto and to people who were unable to travel to work, school, or market.

The governors of West and Central Java, the police, and the State Operations Agency (*Badan Usaha Milik Negara*, BUMN) recognised that the dispute had the potential to severely disrupt transportation systems across the regions for some time, thereby creating further social unrest. It offered cheap loans to bus operators to cover their repayments and thus allow them to lower the fees at which they rented out their vehicles to drivers.¹⁵⁹ Authorities now wanted to find a solution. For four weeks, through Ramadan and Lebaran mass violence had been a common feature in Java. It is clear that from mid-February people were tiring of the violence and disruption, which was adding to their hardships. The security apparatus finally took steps to end it.

CONCLUSION

The government, Army and some Islamic groups combined their influence over this period for the cause van Dyke describes as 'the fostering of antipathy toward a minority community'.¹⁶⁰ Overall, much of the violence across Central and West Java was spontaneous, precipitated by price rises for basic goods and general frustration under increasingly pressured conditions. Rather than being purely reactionary, the people who participated were driven by a sense of righteousness and justice. They legitimised acts of violence and theft by referring to their suffering and the minority status of their victims, also to Islamic teachings. The violence against ethnic Chinese became less spontaneous and higher levels of organisation and method were evident as unrest shifted from protests over food prices to outright destruction, that is 'violence which partakes of little else'.¹⁶¹ To an extent that cannot be known, the violence across Java in early 1998 involved figures from politics, Islamic groups and the military. Encouraged by comments by political figures, both military and Islamic, people equated Chineseness with wealth and with the economic crisis. As KISDI Chairman Ahmad Sumargono put

it, 'It is obvious that most Chinese often commit business manipulation and don't have any nationalist commitment.'¹⁶² Comments and rumours put about by top military figures, together with the absence of decisive security systems, also justify this suspicion. Most compelling was the admission by West Java Military Commander, Djamani that the riots in West and Central Java were anticipated. Indeed, the movement of the violence in a westerly direction was already known to the Army. Given this, the lack of protection of Chinese Indonesians and their property, and also efforts to prevent the violence both indicate a level of implicit support on the part of authorities.

Transport networks and motorcycle convoys help to explain the spread of the violence across Java. Evidence also indicates the presence of local 'hired thugs' who acted to instigate violence, actors within what Brass terms a 'riot system'. They were needed to encourage people, no matter how high their level of frustration, to become violent and to target particular locations. The presence of those agents was particularly obvious when violence broke out around bus depots with stranded passengers. It was unlikely that passive and unrelated passengers waiting for buses in a strange town would become violent and know which stores to single out without provocation. The evidence also indicates that the authorities were aware that organised groups were operating and 'tending' the violence.

Earlier in February 1998 the government had demonstrated its power to control public demonstrations and unrest when it announced a 25-day nationwide ban on street protests until one week after the Presidential elections to be held in early March.¹⁶³ Law 5/PNPS/1969 allowed the authorities to imprison anyone for taking part in political activities considered unacceptable. In Central Jakarta on 11 February five activists from a peaceful demonstration against unemployment, price rises and corruption were arrested under this law.¹⁶⁴ The activists included academic Karlina Supelli and other members of Voices of Concerned Mothers (*Suara Ibu Peduli*). Yet, when confronted with demonstrations and food riots in the preceding six weeks, the government had failed to issue such strict rulings and in most cases local authorities failed to implement a security programme at all. The violence was allowed to continue, unhindered by clear instruction from Jakarta or from commanders in the field.

Many commentators from all sections of society were quick to blame the violence on calls by Islamic groups for 'holy war' against hoarders and speculators, which echoed similar threats from the

government. Masdar F. Mas'udi from the Indonesian Society for Pesantren and Community Development was direct: 'Rioters reportedly attacked local hoarders of staple commodities — an action called for by the MUI.' Nonetheless, in spite of strong condemnation, in the last weeks of February the same messages about hoarding and speculating continued to be issued by the government and Islamic groups. Ilyas Rukhiyat, chairman of the law-making body of the NU, issued a statement that hoarding was illegal according to Islamic law. This conflict within the broader Islamic community had resonance with disagreement and conflict after the violence in 1996–97.

A growing number of commentators and activists called on the Suharto government to take responsibility for the economic and political crisis that had given rise to the recent violence. Sociologist Loekman Soetrisno was among those pressing for an apology: 'Do not just blame entrepreneurs of Chinese descent because doing so will only worsen Indonesia's credibility in the international community. It is the government's mistakes and not those of Chinese descent.' Perhaps understanding too well that Suharto would not heed this call, Chinese Indonesian businessmen took matters into their own hands in the only way they knew. They donated food packs and cash to poor families in Jakarta and other areas of Java. In Surabaya, a spokesman for Chinese-Indonesian businessmen explained, 'We live and make money in Indonesia and therefore there is no reason why we should refuse social activity like this.' In Jakarta, as part of a programme initiated by the President's daughter Tutut Chinese Indonesian businessmen handed over to those in need free food worth Rp2.7 billion.¹⁶⁵

In March 1998, Suharto was elected by the MPR unopposed for his seventh consecutive five-year term as President of Indonesia. He then proceeded to appoint a controversial cabinet which included his crony Bob Hasan, a Chinese Indonesian businessman, as Minister for Trade, his daughter Tutut as Minister for Social Affairs, and his protégé B.J. Habibie as Vice President.¹⁶⁶ The political opposition heard throughout the parliamentary election in May 1997 up until early January 1998 was drowned out by the subsequent violence on the streets during the economic crisis, and by intentionally engineered accusations and scandals. The silence would not, however, last long. Undeterred by the disappearances and suspected kidnappings of many activists in the lead up to the election, mass student protests against the government held on campuses across Indonesia grew in intensity from this time on.

4

The Climax

(L)ittle cohesive oppositional unity was discernible at any stage in the process of dethroning Suharto. Equally, the view that he was felled by the Asian currency crisis is misleading; he had survived crisis before and emerged stronger as a result. The crisis was, rather, the catalyst which allowed a broader constellation of factors, many the products of long gestation, to come together and build so much pressure that Suharto found himself no option but to stand down (R.E. Elson).¹

Barely two months into his seventh term as President, on 13 and 14 May 1998 Suharto watched mass violence in Jakarta on his television screen in Egypt, where he was attending a round of meetings with the Group of 15 countries. Since his re-election in March there had been continuous demonstrations by students on campuses across the country, culminating in the shootings of four students by security forces at Trisakti University in West Jakarta on 12 May. The failure of the armed forces and police to stop the violence and to protect citizens and property revealed the extent to which Suharto had lost control over his senior military leaders. His unexpected resignation on 21 May 1998, a week after the violence, signalled the greatest shift in Indonesian politics in over 30 years.

Subsequent investigations revealed that impetus for the violence was an elite power struggle between factions vying to become Suharto's successor with evidence that actors in the violence had military-like characteristics and that some of the devastated areas were close to military installations.² Suharto's highly ambitious son-in-law Lt. Gen. Prabowo Subianto, then Commander of Kostrad (Army Strategic Reserve), was widely considered to be responsible for the violence.³ Before being appointed Kostrad Commander in March 1998 Prabowo had commanded a Kostrad battalion in East Timor in the 1980s and rose quickly within

Kopassus (Special Forces), reaching the rank of colonel in 1992.⁴ Many believed that his focus was set on succeeding his father-in-law. The first target in his sights was the position of Commander of the Armed Forces, held at the time by Gen. Wiranto, who was also the Minister for Defence, close to the President and a favourite to succeed him. At this time Prabowo, as Kopassus commander, was already under suspicion of involvement in the kidnappings of activists and students in the lead up to the election. In May 1998 together with his close ally and friend, the Operations Commander for Greater Jakarta (Pangkooks Jaya) Maj. Gen. Syafrie Sjamsoeddin, Prabowo had considerable control over military operations in the capital. His suspected role in instigating the violence in mid-May 1998 was attributed to the dual aims of terrorising government opponents into silence and showing that Wiranto, his main rival for succeeding Suharto, was 'an incompetent commander who could not control disorder'.⁵ When Suharto stepped down on 21 May 1998, he by-passed both his son-in-law and Wiranto and followed the path of a constitutional transfer of power from President to Vice President, appointing former Minister for Technology, B. J. Habibie, as his successor.

Though Prabowo's involvement was widely suspected, investigations failed to prove it and perhaps never will. Nonetheless, whoever was responsible for instigating the violence and whatever their motives, it was well known that targeting ethnic Chinese would find support among radical Islamic elements such as KISDI — which had recently launched offensives against the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Sofyan Wanandi and other symbols of ethnic Chinese dominance but also more widely. The groundwork had been laid in the previous months in the form of heightened anti-Chinese rhetoric from leaders in the government and these groups. As the anti-Chinese violence in January and February had demonstrated, instigating a major social disruption by encouraging people to engage in acts of violence against Chinese Indonesians was no difficult feat in an increasingly tense atmosphere.

Following Suharto's uncontested nomination for re-election as President on 10 March 1998, Indonesian students launched the final phase of the *reformasi* movement's struggle against the New Order regime. Despite the government's resistance and its refusal to allow the students to protest outside their campuses, the demonstrations continued and were joined by university rectors and lecturers. By the end of April, students in Medan, Yogyakarta, Solo and elsewhere were

clashing daily with security forces, leading up to the climax at Trisakti University on 12 May.

From 12–15 May 1998 mass violence took place in the cities of Jakarta, Solo, Surabaya, Lampung and Palembang, with widespread looting, burning, rapes and killings. This followed similar violence in Medan from 4–8 May during which property and businesses owned by Chinese Indonesians were attacked and women sexually assaulted. The violence continued uncontrolled by police and military for almost five days, going beyond anything that had taken place in the city previously.

In all these cases witnesses reported organised groups of men acting under orders. They also reported large groups of men, women and children of all ages taking unrestrained advantage of the situation to loot goods from stores and shopping malls, often in response to an invitation to do so. Security forces were either absent or inactive. The most devastating violence occurred in Jakarta and Solo, where over one thousand people perished inside shopping malls. In at least three cities, large numbers of mostly Chinese Indonesian women but also *pribumi* and foreigners — possibly well over one hundred — were sexually assaulted and raped in their homes, workplaces, on public transport and the streets. Chinese Indonesians suffered the greatest material losses. In the context of wider assaults against urban poor and women, this violence exposed, more than any other incident in Indonesia's recent history, the vulnerability of Chinese Indonesians as an ethnic minority with pariah status. The violence in Jakarta, especially, received unprecedented international media coverage by news agencies, including CNN and BBC, and also on the worldwide web. It was both spectacular and alarming.

The 'truth' about what happened in these cities on 12–15 May 1998 may never be fully known and efforts to expose the meaning of the violence have been hampered. Moreover, the 'truths' that do exist are highly contested. The May violence was quickly named 'anti-Chinese' but, as already stated, common explanations were that it was state-sponsored or class-based, or an extension of political violence. Such explanations marginalised analysis of motives based on ethnic animosity and resentment. As seen in the earlier cases of violence against Chinese Indonesians, certain representations serve to normalise this violence in Indonesia — to make it everyday rather than extraordinary. Consequently, its power to provoke feelings of horror and shame among Indonesians is reduced, as, ironically is the disruption in local communities where Chinese Indonesians live.

INTERPRETING THE EVENTS OF MAY 1998

While the traumatic combination of the extreme and the everyday blocks traditional claims to synthetic knowledge, attentiveness to its structure can also lead to new forms of knowledge beyond the realist and anti-realist positions and outside traditional disciplines (Michael Rothberg).⁶

The violence of May 1998 was the climax to anti-Chinese violence in recent Indonesian history and therefore forms the core of this study. This is due not only to the large scale and brutality of the violence, but also because it brings together some of its fundamental questions related to studying and interpreting mass violence against an ethnic minority. To begin with we are confronted like Gyanandera Pandey in his study of mass violence in Bhagalpur, India in October 1989, with a dilemma related both to ethics and also scope: 'How do we write the history of such an event?'⁷ Can we write about mass violence such as this by giving it a uniform or single classification? In mass violence, as in war, opportunities are taken to satisfy many and varied urges. As the field of genocidal studies makes clear, it is necessary to separate acts of violence from one another, even though they may occur at a similar time and place.⁸ How do we write about an event of mass violence in which there is a multitude of competing 'truths'? With what tools do we, as researchers and observers, separate these 'histories'? How do we reveal the emotions of such suffering without over-sentimentalising and objectifying the victims?

Further, as the earlier scholars of anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia have asked, to what extent is this violence racially motivated and to what extent are other factors such as economics and religion involved? Theoretical investigations led by Wieviorka, Brass and Horowitz related to 'whether racism is the driving force for violence?' are pertinent here.⁹ Ethnic violence may simply prove a means to an end, which is not necessarily related to its target. The importance of how ethnic violence is conceptualised, or what constitutes anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia is strongly apparent with regard to the cases examined here, particularly in Medan and Solo.

Aside from the basic facts of who was attacked by whom, the classification of the violence, the contexts into which the events were subsequently placed, and the terminology used to describe them also reveal motives for violence. Whether or not the violence in May 1998 was perceived as anti-Chinese and therefore was racially motivated had

a great influence on the recovery of the Chinese-Indonesian community but also on how post-Suharto Indonesia would go about accommodating ethnic minorities. The processes of fact-finding and reporting inform our interpretations of mass violence. Reactions and responses to violence are almost as important as the violence itself because they shape behaviour into the future.

Documenting the May Violence: Sources

There are no tidy endings following mass atrocity (Minow).¹⁰

On 23 July 1998 President Habibie and six of his ministers¹¹ appointed the Joint Fact Finding Team (Joint Team) to investigate the May violence and to bring forward an 'official' version. The new President was responding to condemnation from countries including China, Taiwan and the United States, particularly on behalf of local Chinese-Indonesian communities, as well as pressure from sectors of the Indonesian public, including human rights organisations and Komnas HAM.¹² The Joint Team was a mix of members from the armed forces, police and government, as well as civil society organisations.¹³ Their report, published several months later is a remarkable document for the content under investigation, its methodology and most particularly, its conclusions and recommendations (see Chapter 5).¹⁴ Yet it is also considered by some to be a failed attempt at 'truth seeking' because of its inability to deliver justice.

The Joint Team was given only three months to compile its report. Obstacles included the sheer scale of the events under investigation, the difficulty of locating witnesses willing to testify, the logistics of investigating in multiple cities and, the varied experience in data collection and conflicting methods employed by team members, who came from diverse social sectors. Further difficulties arose as the team hurried to collect data, analyse it in various sub-teams, and collaboratively write a final report for the ministries concerned. In fact, the bulk of data analysed by the sub-teams came from police records and reports compiled by non-government organisations (NGOs), including Volunteers for Humanity (*Tim Relawan Untuk Kemanusiaan*, TRuK) and the state-sponsored Communication Forum for National Unity (*Badan Komunikasi Penghayatan Kesatuan Bangsa*, Bakom PKB). Various team members attested that the mandate they were initially given was far reaching and that the access they had to elite government and military figures

demonstrated the sincerity of Habibie and his ministers about 'finding the facts'.¹⁵ Members of the team, including Saparinah Sadli (Komnas HAM) and Rosita Noer (Bakom PKB) believed that they had been appointed to seek out the truth about the May 1998 violence, including drawing conclusions and making recommendations.¹⁶ However, such understanding of the extent of the Joint Team's role would later prove to be a critical point of conflict.

Given the Joint Team's tight schedule, only very brief training was provided to some members in how to conduct fact-finding and verification. Most members had to learn as they went and only a few had prior experience of such research.¹⁷ Consequently the methods employed in carrying out the research varied considerably.¹⁸ Further, insufficient time to follow-up or verify information meant that much of the data was excluded from the final analysis. When the report was finally produced in October 1998, only the Joint Team, relevant government ministers and a few researchers obtained copies of the full report, which amounted to hundreds of pages of detailed information about the violence in numerous cities. Instead a 20-page executive summary in both Indonesian and English was widely distributed through the media and the Internet.

In addition to the Joint Team report, a series of reports produced by the human rights organisation TRuK very soon after the May violence is a vital source of data and evidence. Led by the well-known Jesuit priest, Sandyawan Sumardi, TRuK was established following the violence in May 1998 from an existing network of volunteers that had come together after the storming of PDI headquarters in July 1996 to provide logistical and humanitarian support to students and activists. When the violence broke out in Jakarta in May 1998 the volunteers responded very quickly to the violence. They went onto the streets in various parts of Jakarta and collected eyewitness reports and data, while also assisting victims. Volunteers recounted pulling bodies from burning shopping malls and following ambulances and emergency vehicles to hospitals in an effort to ascertain the number and identities of the dead. TRuK's offices in Jatinegara served as a clinic and refuge for victims and with other rights groups provided support and counselling. In the immediate aftermath of the violence TRuK's reports were instrumental in exposing not only its systematic nature but also the inaction of the security forces and the high numbers of gang rapes and other sexual assaults.¹⁹ TRuK named the violence as 'crimes against humanity'.²⁰ Local and international media quickly picked up these assessments of the violence from the

Internet, particularly regarding the scale of the rapes. In the weeks following the violence, TRuK volunteers visited other affected cities and liaised with local groups to seek out victims and data. The analysis in these hastily assembled reports is unquestionably flawed, but their raw data, witness testimonies and chronologies are invaluable for understanding what took place.

The mass of documentation, testimonies and research compiled by TRuK and the Joint Team is extensive and detailed. Despite this, the 'facts' of what took place may never emerge. Certain conclusions emerge from the data and its analysis, but also more questions. Clearly, the violence built unstoppable momentum within certain cities and spread contagiously across the country, which may lead to the conclusion that it was a part of some organised system. The skill of those involved in the violence implied that those suspected of orchestrating the violence included members of the military; the absence of security forces to protect citizens led to suspicion that intelligence agencies and the government were involved. There was great speculation that this terror was wrought by agents of the state. But to what ends? Why would the state seek to create such chaos and cause suffering among its people? Immediate reports from the street also pointed to its racialised form. Shops and homes of Chinese Indonesians were singled out and attacked, while some of the main areas targeted, such as Glodok and Pluit, housed large Chinese-Indonesian communities. In communities where Chinese Indonesians were highly assimilated — like Tanjung Priok, Jatinegara and Tangerang — their property was also attacked. However, Chinese Indonesians were not the only targets sought out by the perpetrators: the urban poor and non-Chinese women also suffered. Why this targeting of Chinese-Indonesian property on the one hand and the killing of urban poor on the other? The level of brutality was unlike that seen on previous occasions of anti-Chinese violence. Violence such as rape had been reserved by the state for tactics against separatist movements in rebel provinces and for political dissidents. The questions provoke extreme responses. As Pandey commented, a balance needs to be found between a sensationalised and an overly sanitised telling of the story.²¹

This study does not claim to uncover new evidence that may lead to revelations of who was responsible for the violence in mid-May 1998. The masses of documentation, reports, photographs and personal testimonies produced about the violence in May, although allowing the researcher to compare and contrast in an effort to uncover 'facts', forces the questioning not only of which sources to embrace, but also of the origins of these truths. What can they, in themselves, reveal about the

causes, reasons and meaning for this violence? The existing historiography about the Jakarta violence in particular provides additional compelling 'histories'. These include works by Heryanto, Sidel, Siegel, Lochore, Ang and Tay. In addition, essays by Sai Siew Min, Karlina Supelli and more expansive analysis including that by Hawe Setiawan *et al.*²² provide a range of perspectives of this violence and attempts to understand the responses to it.

Although some of the most remarkable instances of anti-Chinese violence at this time took place in the Indonesian capital, the focus here is on the incidents in Medan and Solo. This is in an effort to challenge the idea that history could or should view the 'May Riots', which occurred in different times and places, as a single 'event', by examining the violent incidents in Medan and Solo in their local contexts.²³

The Local Context: The Violence in Medan and Solo

Failure to individuate riots adequately also de-emphasises agency, for the less sharply discriminated the event is, the less well it will be accounted for in terms of who did what to whom.²⁴

In dominant narratives of the May violence, the 'incidents' in Medan (4–8 May) and Solo (13–15 May), remain peripheral to the main 'event' in Jakarta. Therefore, focusing on Medan and Solo is a way of peeling back the generalisations, the basic facts, to see these incidents more clearly as possibly unique events. These cases show how a single set of 'basic facts' can lead to a range of interpretations and representations of mass violence. At the same time, the 'basic fact' that agents of the state (legitimate and illegitimate) instigated violence is not disputed. Rather, the concern is that the accepted 'basic facts' regarding agency and responsibility deterred deeper investigation of 'the crowd' that followed and joined in the looting, burning and rape. As Brass explained, 'If the state is responsible for riots and pogroms then the people are relieved of responsibility.... But the state does not operate independently of its citizens and subjects, who are themselves implicated in these conflict-generating processes....'²⁵

FIVE DAYS OF VIOLENCE IN MEDAN

(P)atterns of the violence in Medan and surrounds were it seems, used as a template for the pattern of violence in other places like Jakarta, Solo, Surabaya and Lampung.²⁶

The violence against Chinese Indonesians in Medan between 4 and 8 May 1998 provides a different context from the violence in Jakarta and Solo for examining anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia due to the proportional representation of Chinese Indonesians in this multi-ethnic city. Ethnic Chinese are the third largest ethnic group in Medan, with estimates that they comprise up to 12 per cent of the population.²⁷ This compares with proportions of ethnic Chinese in Jakarta of ten per cent²⁸ and in Solo, four per cent.²⁹ Moreover, it is widely observed that ethnic Chinese in Medan tend to be less assimilated than those in Java.

Here (North Sumatra and Riau) a much higher proportion of the Chinese were born in China; they are more 'Chinese', identify less with Indonesia, and by many accounts tend to be more aggressive and energetic than their fellows in Java.³⁰

These distinctions are important for an investigation in search of motive and agency for anti-Chinese violence focused on theories of minority group relations and the perceptions of difference.

Medan was the site of first violence in May 1998. Investigations conducted by the Joint Team and the narrative of the violence provided below shows that links and consistencies with other cases of violence in May 1998 are present. This analysis also reveals the considerable differences in the situation of ethnic Chinese in Medan compared to those in Solo and Jakarta, and their relations with the perpetrators, before and also during the violence. Crucially, these differences almost excluded the violence in Medan from being included in the 'national story' of the 'May Riots' as told by the Joint Team.

Medan is a city in which violence is not an uncommon event, but its scale in May 1998 was unprecedented. Like past incidents of violence against Chinese Indonesians, it cannot be sufficiently explained in terms of ethnic hostility: its economic or class basis is impossible to ignore.³¹ As Heryanto argued about earlier violence in Medan, class-based interpretations of Chinese Indonesians were inextricably linked to their ethnicity. Nonetheless, analysis based on economic motives for this violence fails to explain why other targets were selected. It cannot explain why women, students, symbols of government and police were also attacked, or why looters and provocateurs passed over shops marked as *pribumi*-owned.

The higher proportion of Chinese Indonesians in Medan raises questions about the role of ethnic prejudice as a basis for wider community involvement in the violence and also reveals the role in the violence of

youth groups and *preman* in Medan and their links with the state. Not unlike elsewhere in Indonesia, ethnic Chinese in Medan are an integral part of a system of extortion and rents exchanged for security, however, the special importance of Medan for New Order youth groups like Pemuda Pancasila (PP) means that this violence had national significance.

Student Demonstrations, Police Harassment and Rising Public Anger

By the beginning of May 1998 anti-government demonstrations by students on campuses across the country had been occurring for almost two months. In Medan, demonstrations were held at many campuses in the city. Across Indonesia the atmosphere was increasingly tense as the security forces struggled to maintain control. Not only were students becoming more determined in their efforts, but also the wider public were increasingly showing support for the *reformasi* protests.³² As the clashes increased, so too did the level of public empathy with the students. In Medan, the death of a student on 27 April, albeit because of a vehicle accident, was blamed on the actions of security officials who had fired teargas onto the campus.³³

Some violence accompanied demonstrations on campuses in Medan and surrounds on 2 May 1998, including an attack on a Timor car showroom. The Timor was the 'national' car produced amidst strong controversy by Suharto's younger son, Tommy. This violence was contained and involved students only.³⁴ On 4 May, after the government had announced that it would increase the price of gasoline by up to 70 per cent and triple the cost of electricity,³⁵ frustrations reached a critical level. At the State Teachers' College of Medan (IKIP Negeri), more than five hundred students assembled to demonstrate and the security authorities formed a barricade to prevent them from moving off the campus. During the day, Molotov bombs were allegedly thrown from inside the campus at the security cordon. By afternoon the situation had calmed but security forces sent replacement troops to the campus with the intention of confining students all night. Students were permitted to go home several hours later, but as they left the campus police stopped a group of students. It was reported that the police yelled obscenities at the female students in the group, one of them ripping the veil from a girl's head. The Joint Team report notes that 'A female student with the initials SN was also groped and her breasts were squeezed by the policeman.'³⁶ The girl collapsed.

There were several witnesses to the assault and a short time later a large crowd gathered at a nearby traffic police post. Outnumbered, the police retreated as the building was attacked and its contents destroyed. The protesters then attacked a shopping centre and another police post.³⁷ By this time, thousands of people had come onto the streets. They smashed traffic lights, police posts, cars and shophouses, and burned tyres.³⁸

The following morning news circulated that more than 50 people suspected of involvement in the previous night's violence had been detained. A crowd arrived at the police post where they were being held and demanded their release. When confronted by more police, the protesters attacked the building. Reportedly, anti-riot troops stationed at the nearby state television (TVRI) studios stood and watched as the crowd moved on the police.³⁹ Estimated at hundreds, the crowd moved towards Tembung market, attacking shops, houses and cars. At the market, people looted Chinese-Indonesian shops, and, it is said, largely passed over those indicating they were '*milik pribumi*', owned by *pribumi*. Many shops had this slogan written in graffiti on their doors and windows and had hung prayer mats outside.⁴⁰ Women, children and the elderly were among the looters. Around mid-afternoon, Mobile Brigade (*Brigade Mobil*, Brimob) troops finally arrived and used teargas to disperse the crowd.

The following day, almost every shop and bank in the city was closed and the streets were eerily quiet. Early morning a large crowd assembled at the Medan supermarket, where they erected a barricade made from wood and tyres and set it alight. The supermarket was looted. The Joint Team reported that ten men dressed in civilian clothing and on motorbikes fired on people with revolvers and chased some of them down alleyways.⁴¹ Thousands of people attacked shops, burned cars and looted in Medan and surrounding districts. For example, in the town of Lubuk Pakam, Deli Serdang district, 1,200 kiosks were destroyed by fire in Linpres market.⁴² Efforts by police and anti-riot troops to disperse the looters by firing rubber bullets resulted in many injuries but failed to stop the violence. In the town of Titipapan, at least seven people were injured by rubber bullets, which had been allegedly fired into the air.⁴³ Further violence broke out in many different locations on 7 May. At the end of these five days of violence in and around Medan, six people had died, including two who were shot,⁴⁴ one hundred were injured (nine with gunshot wounds) and over seven hundred buildings had been damaged or destroyed. The estimated total cost was several hundreds of

billions of rupiah. Police announced that 51 people had been detained for questioning.⁴⁵ The Joint Team investigation found that Chinese Indonesians had suffered the majority of material losses.

Chinese Indonesians in Medan and *Kriminalitas*

Regulations are not tight. Things are very flexible (Asamadinata, Medan resident and lawyer).⁴⁶

The violence against Chinese Indonesians in Medan in May 1998 provides evidence of its institutionalisation within Indonesian society. There are also compelling local institutional bases for the continued 'outsider' status of ethnic Chinese in Medan's wider society, which are both voluntary and involuntary. Key to understanding their situation in Medan is the system of institutionalised gangersterism or '*premanism*' in that city, for which Chinese Indonesians are the cash cows.⁴⁷ A crucial explanation for the ongoing violence against Chinese Indonesians in May 1998 was that the structures within which the terrorising and violence occurred were well established in Medan and were focused around Chinese-Indonesian businesses. The reliance of ethnic Chinese on extra-legal resources for their security and protection is integral to this structure. As a result of what Ang terms being trapped in their own 'historical debris',⁴⁸ fear and obsession with security dominated the lives of most Chinese Indonesians. Many of those who extorted rents, including agents of the government, military, and 'goons', were part of these extra-legal structures and knew that this fear was easily exploited with little cost to the greater national condition, at least until May 1998.

Before the violence, the Chinese-Indonesian community in Medan was used to being systematically terrorised. The Joint Team investigation discovered that, in the days before the violence, Chinese Indonesians had received threatening phone calls and visits from heavy-handed *preman* warning them of mass violence.⁴⁹ It was reported that members of the youth groups Pancasila Youth (*Pemuda Pancasila*, PP) and Work Service Youth Association (*Ikatan Pemuda Karya*, IPK) were involved in demanding money from many Chinese Indonesians in return for protection and were known to the shop-owners.⁵⁰ This intimidation continued during the days of violence and commonly preceded an attack on a shop by a larger group. Shops were looted and goods piled in the street before being set alight. The Joint Team concluded that local gangs took advantage of the instability in the city caused by the student demonstrations to terrorise the community.

Chinese Indonesians in Medan were familiar with this pattern of threats and before the violence, therefore, were confident that nothing would come of them, provided they paid the gangs as usual. Consequently, when the violence broke out, many Chinese Indonesians therefore experienced a mixture of tremendous fear and anger, as well as a strange sense of betrayal. Some fled to Malaysia and Singapore, whilst others sought safety in Jakarta and elsewhere in Indonesia.⁵¹ Some simply left their homes to stay temporarily in indigenous-owned hotels in the city, which were surrounded by tight security. In behaviour unique to Medan, others chose to band together in neighbourhood groups, or to defend their property alone, arming themselves with sabres, swords and battery acid.⁵²

The fact that local *preman*, gang members and heavies were responsible for creating this mood of terror and provoking the violence may render Medan's story less noteworthy than the larger story of the May Riots. As Ryter's work on the PP in Medan shows, the types of actors involved in the violence in Medan could be described as part of the normal fabric of its daily life. As a youth arm of the League of Supporters of Indonesian Independence (*Ikatan Pendukung Kemerdekaan Indonesia*, IPKI), the PP had its origins in Medan in the late 1950s and was heavily involved in the extortion rackets targeting Chinese-Indonesian business in particular.⁵³ The Joint Team regarded the Medan violence as more localised than in Solo or Jakarta, because a visible network of local actors was involved and evidence of 'outside' involvement was absent.⁵⁴ Indeed, if the events of the following week had not taken place, this violence would never have been described as having 'national' dimensions.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the Medan violence — perhaps even more than the Jakarta and Solo violence — demonstrates the workings of the insidious national framework that Lindsey and others have referred to as '*premanisme*' or the *preman* state. Within this system a *preman* or thug and his gang form part of the grassroots structures of the state, being connected to its legitimate structures by a network of rent-collecting deals and other criminal activities with figures in the government, military and police. As Lindsey explains, '(e)xtortionists and thugs morph into paramilitaries and political associations'⁵⁶ and vice-versa.⁵⁷ In his study of *premanisme* politics, Gunawan argues, as Ryter does, that the New Order regime explicitly used the PP and similar groups as organisations of terror and violence.⁵⁸ In their report on the Medan violence, Joint Team investigators named members of PP and IPKI as provocateurs and crowd 'movers'.⁵⁹

Blurred Distinctions between Government and *Preman*

Other evidence uncovered by the Joint Team investigators lent further credence to the argument that in Medan, as elsewhere, distinctions between *preman* and *pemerintah* (government) and youth groups like PP were blurred.⁶⁰ In a post-violence sweep, police detained a suspect whom they then identified as a member of the Special Forces (*Komando Pasukan Khusus*, Kopassus). Like the ten motorcyclists who were present at the raid on the Medan supermarket, he was dressed in civilian clothing and carried a revolver. In an incident on 5 May outside Medan in Deli Serdang, a witness told the Joint Team that PP members attacked his fruit stall and he himself was beaten.⁶¹ A number of PP youths were apprehended by the security forces, but were merely addressed by the local military commander and then released.⁶²

Further evidence is found in developments, which took place in Simalungun district near Medan on 6 May. In response to rumours that looting would take place there, the Regional Security Council (*Musyawarah Pemimpin Daerah*, Muspida) instructed residents to form a neighbourhood security system (*siskamling*) to protect their homes. Through the night of the 6–7 May, residents patrolled the streets and there were no disturbances. The next evening, the chief of the local army post (*Komando Rayon Militer*, Koramil) visited Simalungun and was outraged that residents were patrolling the streets. He ordered them to return home and charged the Brimob with the task of protecting residents. As troops were moving people off the streets, a crowd led by local *preman* was growing at a major intersection in town. Witnesses told the Joint Team investigators that when Brimob arrived on the scene, they gave permission to the *preman* to continue. As the *preman* led a crowd towards a shopping centre, they simply walked behind. When they reached the shopping centre, the *preman* pelted it with rocks. Some who were carrying iron bars broke into a store and encouraged people to loot its contents. The security forces stood by and watched.⁶³

The failure of the security forces to act on calls for a curfew or to step in to protect businesses and homes demonstrates some element of support for the violence. At the very least, there was a complete lack of security co-ordination. When police finally moved to stop the violence and looting, rather than fire into the air, some fired rubber bullets into crowds that included women and children, killing at least two and injuring many.⁶⁴ Afterwards the police and military provided weak

excuses for this lack of control and exchanged accusations with student groups. They apportioned blame to the students, who in turn insisted that 'ghost masses' had incited the violence,⁶⁵ led by a puppeteer (*dalang*) whom they could not identify.⁶⁶ The Police Chief of North Sumatra told the media, 'Why (did) we try to prevent any student demonstrations (being) conducted outside the campus? Because if they take it to the street, look at what happens.'⁶⁷ The head of the military area command (Kodam) later told Joint Team investigators that his men had been reluctant to intervene decisively in the violence because they were concerned about accusations that security forces had earlier shot students.⁶⁸

The Medan violence attracted interest at the highest levels of national security. Chief of the Armed Forces, Gen. Wiranto, visited on 6 May, during which he toured some of the areas hit by violence to assess the security situation first hand. Wiranto had earlier made comments about the national importance of the situation in Medan in terms of containing the student protests, saying, 'Like in Medan I gave orders to the Regional Commander (Panglima) and Regional Police Chief (Kapolda) to take harsh action against whoever is the mastermind behind the riots outside the campus ...'.⁶⁹ During his visit Wiranto ordered the security forces to act quickly and decisively to control the violence, warning, 'ABRI will take strict measures for those performing this brutality and anarchy.'⁷⁰ Wiranto was not the only national military figure following events in Medan closely. On 8 May, Lt. Gen. Prabowo announced that one of his Army Strategic Reserve (Kostrad) units had already been dispatched to Medan to support local troops and assured the public that others were ready to go into troubled areas should the need arise.⁷¹ Notwithstanding this interest, few orders and very little decisive action seemed to filter down to the streets. It is telling that, in spite of Wiranto's own intervention, the violence continued for three days after his visit. The discourse started here by regional and national security leaders was that if the student demonstrations threatened to bring wider violence and chaos, they were prepared to suppress it at any cost. The reality, however, was that the violence in Medan continued and subsequently occurred in other cities without decisive attempts by the military to stop it.

Eventually, inconsistent directives from the national security leaders led to Medan's security apparatus attempting its own solutions. In what seemed a last ditch measure, and perhaps an admission of the security apparatus' lack of control, Regional Commander Yuzaini called on

community and religious leaders, youth organisations, and the people themselves to work with security forces to prevent violence, and to step-up *siskamling* operations in their neighbourhoods in order to protect themselves.⁷²

The Beginning of a Trend?

It was later revealed that the violence in Medan had involved cases of sexual violence against women, including Chinese-Indonesian women. In addition to the case already cited concerning the assault of a student by a police officer on 4 May, women's group Mitra Perempuan claimed that twenty students reported being sexually harassed by police. They claimed to have been forced to do improper things such as removing their clothes, running and doing push-ups.⁷³ In separate investigations into sexual assault and rape in Medan, TRuK found that three rapes had occurred; the Joint Team verified one case of rape (reported to police), one of sexual assault and six incidents of sexual harassment. Over 100 cases of sexual harassment and assault in the period 4–8 May were recounted by victims but never reported and could not be verified. Only five claims were reported to police.⁷⁴

The Joint Team, police, military and residents classified most of the actors in the Medan violence as local criminals and thugs. It was therefore not obviously 'state sponsored' violence in the terms used to refer to the later May Riots. Nevertheless, the fact that few outsiders were involved in the Medan violence does not mean that these were less orchestrated and engineered, nor that they were without national significance. On the contrary, in Medan the activities of local *preman* and youth groups, including those with national reach like the PP, provide clues to explaining the systematic and national scale of the violence that followed only a week later. The public discourse of security leaders in relation to these events also contributed to the likelihood of large-scale violence elsewhere. As Munir, then Head of the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (Kontras) explained: 'It is clear that violence is (seen) as the method that is most appropriate to solve problems in society.'⁷⁵ Behaviour such as Chinese Indonesians forming vigilante groups to protect themselves, police harassment of female students and mob attacks on police posts reveals a society more familiar with violence and violent reprisals than with justice and security.

Did Medan's residents — Chinese Indonesian and *pribumi* — consider this to be 'anti-Chinese violence'? The local community, including

the security apparatus, distinguished the violence from past anti-Chinese violence on the basis that it was incited by either student demonstrations or ‘ghost-like’ masses intent on discrediting the *reformasi* student movement. The fact that extortion, threats and violence against Chinese-Indonesian business was normal in Medan, that it was a part of the socio-economic and political structure of the city, calls for explanations other than ethnic antagonism. After this violence, the presence of such a structure based on prejudice and discrimination against Chinese Indonesians because of their economic success and ethnicity, was not examined.

JAKARTA, 12–14 MAY 1998

The Joint Team believes that the 13–15 May 1998 incidents could not be parted from the social, political condition and dynamics of the Indonesian society during the period, as well as its succeeding impacts. Previous events and incidents such as the General Election 1997, the kidnapping of some non-government activists, economic crisis, the General Assembly of the People’s Consultative Council of the Republic of Indonesia 1998, continual students demonstrations and the shootings of Trisakti students, all closely correspond to the 13–15 May incident. Those incidents were continuing incidents of violence, which led to the outbreak of spreading riots on 13–15 May 1998 (Joint Team Executive Summary).⁷⁶

On 9 May, a day after the violence petered out in Medan, President Suharto departed for Egypt. At the airport he told the press, ‘I understand the suffering of the people, I know, I was once poor and I judge that if we keep going like this there will be no progress.’⁷⁷ Three days later, security forces killed four students from Trisakti University as they attempted to take their *reformasi* protest onto the streets of Jakarta. This event brought the violence that had been plaguing many parts of Indonesia to the very centre of the nation.

On the morning of 12 May approximately ten thousand students assembled at Trisakti University campus in Grogol, West Jakarta for a long march to the parliament building. Police forbade the students to leave the campus and a long confrontation ensued with students staging a sit-in outside the campus gates. Mid-afternoon, amid a flurry of activity from some students within the campus, including stones allegedly being thrown at security forces, shots were fired. Four students — Elang Mulya, Heri Hartanto, Hendriawan and Hafidin Royan — were killed

as they hurried inside the campus grounds.⁷⁸ The death of the students was a catalyst for violence that began the next day.⁷⁹

Incidents of violence took place almost simultaneously across the vast city. At least one thousand people perished in fires at shopping malls, notably in Klender and Jatinegara in Jakarta's east. The violence hit large swathes of the city from Glodok (Jakarta's Chinatown) in the north-west, where the main commercial area, including luxurious shopping malls, electrical markets and a traditional market, was badly damaged. From Tanjung Priok in the north and Tangerang in the west, to Kebayoran and beyond in the south, thousands of shops, shophouses, malls and car yards were destroyed. Most properties targeted for attack were Chinese Indonesian-owned and almost no part of Jakarta escaped.⁸⁰

The violence was seldom interrupted by police or other security forces. Eyewitnesses and victims recounted that they attempted to call for police assistance and were unsuccessful. When the police did scatter looters, they soon returned.⁸¹ In Glodok's large market for electrical goods, owners of the few stores saved from the looters admitted to paying local *preman* to protect them, although this did not always prove a guarantee.⁸² In Tanjung Priok, men on motorbikes led looters to selected locations, mostly Chinese-Indonesian businesses, which were looted and burned whilst Chinese Indonesians took shelter in the homes of their *pribumi* neighbours. At Klender's Yogya Plaza and the Matahari department store in Jatinegara, eyewitnesses reported seeing people from nearby *kampungs* being encouraged by men to loot the shops.⁸³ The buildings were then locked and set ablaze. Hundreds perished in these incidents. A similar fire in the Ramayana Shopping centre in Tanjung Priok claimed over forty victims, most of whom were urban poor from nearby slums. They included pregnant women and children.⁸⁴ The Joint Team and TRuK reports conclude that the techniques of many of the participants pointed to military training, while the simultaneity of the violence across the city indicated a degree of organisation. The chain of responsibility for the violence was traced to the highest levels of military and politics.⁸⁵

Incidents of sexual assault and rape came to light in the days and weeks after the violence. Women — mostly Chinese Indonesian but also *pribumi* and foreign citizens — were attacked on the streets and in their homes, often by gangs of men. These assaults took place across the city, but particularly in West and North Jakarta, regions that had high concentrations of Chinese Indonesian residents.⁸⁶ Accounts collected from the rape victims by TRuK and women's groups such as Kalyanamitra

detail brutal assaults, often in front of other family members and including torture. Witnesses and victims reported that their attackers shouted anti-Chinese slogans and other abuse. The rapes continued after the violence had subsided. Victims and their families were warned against going to the police and threatened with further violence. In her report compiled after a visit to Indonesia in late 1998, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Radhika Coomaraswamy, concluded that 'the Chinese community appears to be terrorised by the events and victims are reluctant to come forward'. She added:

Although the Special Rapporteur was repeatedly told that the Chinese were rich and wealthy, many of the victims she met who had been raped during the May riots, appeared to be from lower-middle-class backgrounds. Some were single women living alone, striving to make ends meet. It appeared that the victims were in fact poor....⁸⁷

The mass violence in Jakarta and particularly the rumours of sexual violence greatly shocked Indonesians. The students' demands for a change in government and *reformasi* were echoed in the international community's calls for security and peace across the country as the violence was quickly represented as state-condoned, if not co-ordinated.

THE 'OTHER' MAY RIOTS: VIOLENCE IN SOLO, MAY 1998

Despite occurring more or less simultaneously and being more destructive in relative terms, the violence in Solo was largely overshadowed by events in Jakarta. This was in great part due to its local representations. Upon witnessing the attention that the Jakarta riots had generated and no doubt aware of the potential for Solo to also become headlines, locals recognised their power to control how the violence was reported and thereby avoid similar attention.

In its immediate aftermath, the attention given by the international community and national media to the May Riots focused on their apparent 'anti-Chinese' or racial element. Accordingly, when the residents of Solo represented their violence as anything but anti-Chinese violence, it remained largely unnoticed by outsiders. Despite the range of interest groups with varying political agendas, in Solo representation of what the May violence was *not* was uniform across all groups. Although actual representations of this violence varied among groups, the political objective of each was the same — to oppose any representation of racialised violence by various groups. By succeeding in this, the residents of Solo

avoided the attention and condemnation that Jakarta attracted. The Solo case allows us to examine how a single set of 'basic facts' can be transformed into multiple interpretations of a violent event. It will be argued that in Solo certain key elements or 'basic facts' gathered from news reports and from official reports have dominated interpretations of the violence.

The Pattern of the Solo Violence: The Basic Facts

Locals believed that conditions in Solo in mid-May 1998 were 'just right' for violence. Pro-*reformasi* student demonstrations had begun in early March 1998 at various universities but particularly at Muhammadiyah Surakarta University (*Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta*, UMS) and later at Sebelas Maret University (*Universitas Negeri Sebelas Maret*, UNS). Almost daily from March until mid-May, police stationed outside the universities refused to allow the students to leave their campuses and protest on the streets. During these months, students and police clashed frequently. Police fired teargas and rubber bullets at the students, wounding many. One such clash at UNS campus on 8 May 1998, known as 'Bloody Friday', saw hundreds of students wounded, some by bullets.⁸⁸ Throughout this period large crowds gathered outside campuses to hear the protest speeches and to watch the clashes with police.

On 14 May students gathered at UMS Pabelan campus to protest against the killings at Trisakti University in Jakarta.⁸⁹ The security forces were waiting. A clash erupted, being triggered, reports claimed, by provocateurs throwing objects at the police from inside the campus.⁹⁰ Onlookers heard the screams of the students and moved closer to see what was happening and to assist the wounded. The crowd would not disperse when commanded by the security forces. Instead people became angry and progressed east towards the city, damaging public facilities such as street signs and public telephones before moving directly to their first target, a 'Timor' car showroom, as they had in Medan.⁹¹ One thousand strong, the crowd moved to the city centre where they attacked banks and public buildings. When Kostrad troops prevented them from getting close to the Town Hall they split up, breaking into shops and offices, looting and burning. Violence spread to most districts around Solo, including Nusukan, Gading, Tipes, Jebres and into surrounding towns like Sukoharjo, Karanganyar, Boyolali and Sragen.⁹² At strategic locations around the city, such as intersections or near shopping or business centres, tyres were set alight.⁹³ This brought people onto the streets and soon violence would break out around these locations.

By mid-afternoon, smoke from burning tyres, cars, motorcycles and buildings filled the sky above Solo.

The population of Chinese Indonesians in Solo at that time was around 24,000 or 4.4 per cent of the total population, yet the Chinese Indonesian head of Solo's chamber of commerce estimated that 80 per cent of shop-owners in Solo were ethnic Chinese. He believed this accounted for *pribumi* resentment and suspicion towards Chinese Indonesians: 'It is difficult to avoid the impression that they (Chinese) "play games" when at certain times products suddenly disappear from the market or distribution is at a standstill.'⁹⁴

Targets

To speak of targets in a violent event implies organisation and intention. In Solo this was definitely the case. The locations sought out included obvious commercial sites such as shops, factories and showrooms. Apart from 'Chinese' targets, tokens of government were targeted, including public facilities such as street lights, public telephones and the home of Harmoko, then Golkar Chairman, as well as symbols of wealth such as the Atrium 21 cinema complex, cars and motorcycles. The Joint Team report and others⁹⁵ tell of the existence of an Operational Target List used by the riot co-ordinators who marked target sites with burning tyres. In late February 1998, a group of wealthy local Chinese Indonesian businessmen had met with military leaders at a restaurant. The businessmen agreed to donate money which, they were told, would be used to distribute basic foodstuffs to those in need,⁹⁶ as was being done by Chinese Indonesians in other cities in order to offset the threat of violence. However, in the weeks leading to 14 May 1998, Chinese Indonesians in Solo became increasingly anxious as the economic crisis escalated and student demonstrations grew violent. Witnesses reported seeing people moving about the kampungs in the days before the violence asking if ethnic Chinese lived there and taking notes. In one case during the violence rioters attacked a house situated next to Sholat Magnih church. When the owner came out of the church to meet the rioters they were surprised to find it was not Chinese Indonesian-owned. A few of them apologised to the owner and left. In another case, a family's home was attacked because they would not answer questions about who owned it. Reportedly, they quickly stopped attacking the house when somebody told them it was the home of a Javanese.⁹⁷

In the aftermath of the violence, it is clear that whatever or whoever the intended 'targets', the victims of the violence spanned the socio-economic spectrum. Most of the dead were people on low incomes caught inside shops that were set alight. It is also estimated that 40,000 out of a total workforce of 298,000 lost their jobs as a direct result of the destruction of factories, shops, banks and offices.⁹⁸ Regardless of the level of planning and organisation of mass violence, as the crowds became larger and more diverse, their goals inevitably became less fixed and their targets more random.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, a grasp of the damage to the Solo economy, and the overall hurt inflicted could not have been absent from the organisers' calculations.

Actors

The violence in Solo occurred on such a scale that it could be said that a considerable percentage of the local population performed some role in it, if only as passive spectators. The Joint Team classified the actors in the violence into three groups. The first were the 'passive masses', who were on the street to watch. Clearly these people did not feel threatened by what was happening around them, indeed they might have felt excited by it. The second group were the 'active masses', who came to see what was happening and joined in.¹⁰⁰ The third and most influential group were the 'provocateurs'. Numbering approximately 15 people, this group facilitated effective lines of communication using walkie-talkies, moving quickly about the city on motorcycles while a van transported petrol, iron bars and alcohol to key locations. The provocateurs wore headbands and in some cases gloves and had distinctive physical characteristics and skills. They worked the crowd, exciting them by calling out provocative statements and giving directions. They used the iron bars to wrench open shop doors and smash windows, then invited onlookers to 'come in and take'. They then took Molotov bombs from the van, filled them with petrol, lit them, and tossed them into buildings.¹⁰¹ The Joint Team indicated that they strongly believed that these men were military trained, if not serving members of the military. When the violence finally subsided, they had disappeared.

Perhaps the most startling factor in relation to the violence and what most shocked local people, was that it was able to continue for two days unhindered by security forces. The evidence indicates not merely ineptitude on the part of the security forces but actual collusion with the rioters. An eyewitness reported that he saw police barricading

themselves into their posts rather than attempting to stop the rioters.¹⁰² In other cases police and military stood by as the looting and burning went on around them. The Joint Team was told that early on the first day of the violence an army colonel issued a command which he claimed came from the command centre (Komandan Korem) in Surakarta, ordering that security personnel were not to fire warning shots into the air to disperse rioters. Most alarming was that the number of security personnel on the streets of Solo was extremely low on those two days. The Joint Team discovered that eleven companies, consisting of Mobile Brigade (Brimob), crowd control troops (*Pengendalian Massa*, Dalmas) and Kostrad troops, were situated at the UMS campus on 14 May, leaving the city of Solo itself largely unprotected.¹⁰³

The Joint Team also discovered the surprising fact that Kopassus Group 2 Special Forces troops had been flown out of Solo on 14 May. The departure of four flights that afternoon coincided with the time the violence was gathering momentum. The destination for these troops remains unknown, as does the date of their return.¹⁰⁴ The Joint Team also found that although the Military Resort Commander (*Komandan Resort Militer*, Danrem) had imposed a curfew for the evenings of 14–15 May, violence continued throughout curfew hours. Many security personnel later said that they were unaware of the curfew. In addition, it was concluded that most of the meagre security personnel available over those two days were concentrated in a few select places. These included the Sheraton Hotel owned by Tommy Suharto, the Ibu Tien Suharto monument, Suharto's house and the Town Hall. The Joint Team described the security situation in Solo in damning tones: 'Efforts by the security forces to prevent the riot from emerging were not effective and virtually not carried out seriously'.¹⁰⁵ They concluded that responsibility for this violence must be placed on the armed forces, if only because they failed to act to prevent or stop the violence. The Joint Team also noted their suspicions that armed forces personnel were 'involved' in the violence.

How Was the Violence Interpreted and Represented in Solo?

The residents of Solo and those who closely followed the Solo violence would have known these particular elements of the riot when they came to interpret and represent it. Coverage of the violence in the local paper *Solo Pos* was extensive, while news and rumour travelled quickly among the small population. On the night of 14 May 1998, electricity was as

noted, out across the city. Therefore television and radio coverage of events did not reach residents until the next afternoon. *Solo Pos* was the first source of news for most residents, who had been confined to their homes during 14 May. The extent of knowledge of the violence varied from individual to individual and was naturally based on personal experience, but the way in which people chose to understand these elements and to select a context and form, led to different representations.¹⁰⁶ The local groups most active in interpreting the violence were the students, the government and military, the local elite and the Chinese Indonesians. Although they all struggled separately to control how it was represented, their objectives were very similar.

Students, Government and Military and Local Elite

On 15 May amidst the continuing violence, ten thousand student protesters and sympathisers finally made their 'long march' from UNS to the Town Hall in the centre of Solo. The crowd walked peacefully. At the Town Hall students asked for forgiveness for the violence of the previous day and thanked security personnel for allowing them to complete their peaceful protest.¹⁰⁷ The students insisted that their two-month action on campuses across Solo, while frequently erupting into violence, had in no way acted as a prelude to the rioting on 14–15 May 1998. Instead, they explained it as mob violence with no connection with the *reformasi* struggle or their own protests. By marching peacefully to the Town Hall, the students aimed to set themselves apart from the rioters and from the violence that was occurring around them. Theirs was a pure and righteous — not riotous — cause.

The reaction of national political leaders to Solo was largely overwhelmed by Suharto's resignation the next week. The most influential Solonese figure in elite politics to speak about the Solo violence was Amien Rais, then riding the wave of student demonstrations to national fame and power. He was the highly respected leader of the mass Islamic organisation Muhammadiyah, whose university, UMS, had been the scene of the major clash between police and students on 14 May. At a rally in Solo in June 1998, he declared that all Indonesians should be ashamed of the violence and told the crowd that the damage done to Solo was more serious than that in Jakarta.¹⁰⁸ However, his most significant statement was that a *dalang* or mastermind was behind the violence. As a powerful, elite voice for Solo in Jakarta, Rais' representation of the violence as orchestrated from 'outside', together with use of the

term *dalang*, had impact. His statement made the headlines of the national daily, *Kompas*.

Army representative Colonel Sriyanto, also at the rally, continued the emphasis on apportioning responsibility for the violence as he attempted to respond to increasing criticism of the role of the security forces. He asked forgiveness for the violence but continued to deny responsibility: 'We are sorry if the riot was not fully brought under control by ABRI [Armed Forces], but we can't do everything.'¹⁰⁹ Sriyanto claimed that Army personnel were limited at the time of the violence because members of Kopassus Special Forces were at the edge of the city, and one Kostrad and one Infantry Brigade were on their way to Jakarta. The small number left behind, he said, were busy assisting police to control student protesters at UMS. He defended the behaviour of security personnel by arguing that conditions on the ground were extremely difficult, and that taking severe action against rioters would have put spectators at risk. The military's representation of the violence was in terms of mobs gone mad, acting in an uncontrollable and spontaneous manner, outnumbering security forces, and guided by an unknown and intangible, yet convenient, 'third party'.

A few days after the violence the Sultan of Surakarta, Pakoe Boewono XII, issued a statement condemning the violence and declaring that such behaviour was not in line with the cultural values held by *wong Solo* (Solonese).¹¹⁰ On 19 May the Sultan and other community leaders, including Mujiono from the Surakarta Cultural Centre (*Taman Budaya Surakarta*, TBS) and Sardono, a leading traditional dancer, visited a Chinese-Indonesian family whose home and shop had been burnt down, leaving them with only the clothes on their backs.¹¹¹ This visit, a rare public appearance by the aging Sultan, was covered in the local and national press and had the intention of demonstrating the city elite's solidarity with the victims, and more particularly with the traumatised Chinese-Indonesian community. Days later at a meeting held at the Kraton for five thousand students, the Sultan also pledged a symbolic amount of Rp1,111,111 to the students' struggle for reform.¹¹²

After the violence, community leaders, including artists, professionals, businessmen and academics, formed the Association of Solonese (*Paguyuban Wong Solo*, PWS) to assist victims to rebuild their lives and with the long term objective of encouraging unity, equality and tolerance in Solo among all ethnicities, religions and classes. The most immediate work undertaken by this group was to help victims with funding and with the difficult process of making insurance claims. Insurance firms

in Solo were rejecting all claims because they considered the violence to have been a 'political riot', an event not covered under their policies.¹¹³ In the wake of the violence, respected community leaders in PWS and TBS saw before them a treasured city and its people facing not only a physical crisis but also a crisis of identity. Nevertheless, the approach of the local elite varied. Mujiono and others at TBS refused to excuse the behaviour of the rioters and discounted the claim that it had been provoked by outside forces. They maintained that the violence was spontaneous for the most part and that the emotions and frustration of the people were such that they were easily enticed, concluding that 'the ordinary people (*masyarakat*) were responsible for the violence'.¹¹⁴ Others insisted that the provocateurs were to blame, that without these actors the local people could not have performed such acts.¹¹⁵ Whatever their interpretation of the violence, the local elite agreed that ethnic Chinese were the main victims and targets. At the same time, they spoke of relations between Chinese Indonesians and *pribumi* in Solo as being 'just like elsewhere in Indonesia', and refused to believe that racialised motives were behind the actions of the *wong* Solo. In interviews in Solo in late August 1999, people made this observation almost without exception.¹¹⁶ They explained that Chinese Indonesians were restricted to the economic sector and were subject to other discriminatory laws and behaviours and that relations between Chinese Indonesians and *pribumi* were affected by these issues. They lived and worked together, but other interaction was minimal.

A great sense of shame was evident in the admission by the people at TBS, the protectors of Javanese high culture, about the level of local involvement. At the same time they avoided confronting why the violence occurred and why Chinese Indonesians were its main targets. A founding member of PWS, also a lecturer in sociology and psychology at UMS and member of Muhammadiyah, Yayah Khisbayah, spoke of the need to teach the people about tolerance as a means to providing a lasting solution to violence and discrimination in Solo. She seemed to be a lone voice willing to speak openly of racial intolerance and discrimination as a *cause* of the violence and to represent the violence as at least partially ethnically motivated.¹¹⁷

Journalists and editorial staff on the local daily *Solo Pos* played an important and public role in representing this violence. *Solo Pos* was the primary source of information for many Solonese. In its early responses to events, *Solo Pos* was aware of its moral responsibility in reporting and editorialising and also sensitive to the social context.

In an editorial on 18 May, entitled 'The Time Has Come For Introspection', the editorial staff wrote of the psychological trauma of the people and condemned the behaviour of many locals. They were also understanding of the causes of antipathies: 'The feelings of the people are also not easy to discount when they have been forcefully evicted from their land by business people working in collusion with others to develop shopping centres and elite housing estates.'¹¹⁸ In response to demands from its readership, in July *Solo Pos* published a book of photographs and essays about the unrest. In the introduction its purpose was explained as hoping to serve 'not only as an album, a souvenir of these events, what is more important is that we can gain wisdom and learn from this event'.¹¹⁹ In an essay in the book, M.T. Arifin wrote briefly about 'the fate of the Chinese residents'.¹²⁰ He attempted to understand why Chinese Indonesians were the main victims of the people's anger by repeating common stereotypes of ethnic Chinese as wealthy and exclusive. He touched on the local relations between the *pribumi* and Chinese Indonesians, arguing that they were not harmonious and were affected not only by a wealth gap, but also a 'cultural gap', which had led to violence often in Solo's recent history. Arifin argued that sentiments such as these prompted people to attack Chinese-Indonesian businesses and homes when encouraged to do so by *preman*. Although he acknowledged and attempted to understand why Chinese Indonesians were the main victims, Arifin and the *Solo Pos* editorial team, like the rest of the local elite, did not try to understand why the 'cultural gap' remained.

Chinese Indonesians

Chinese Indonesians suffered almost all of the material losses totalling Rp 457 billion (US\$46 million).¹²¹ Nevertheless, in its aftermath, the overwhelming response of this community was to reject claims that this had been violence focused on race. The reasons they gave for this were numerous. A leader in the textile industry and owner of the largest textile firm Batik Keris, Handoko, was not alone when he argued that because *pribumi*-owned shops were damaged along with those owned by Chinese Indonesians, the event could not be deemed to be anti-Chinese violence. He told a meeting of Chinese Indonesians and community leaders in June 1998, 'If this riot was an anti-race movement, then it would not have been possible for me to travel about among the masses without anything happening to me.' He asked why, if the violence was based on

anti-Chinese sentiment, did he have to stand down his 11,000 *pribumi* workers as a consequence? ¹²²

Crucially, Chinese Indonesians argued that the evidence of the violence being incited by provocateurs demonstrated that those involved lacked personal motivation to harm Chinese Indonesians; they were merely following the provocateurs. Some Chinese Indonesians such as Budi Mulyono, head of the Solo Community Union (*Persatuan Masyarakat Solo*, PMS), a 60-year-old mainly Chinese-Indonesian community organisation, saw the causes as multifaceted. Political and social problems compounded by the economic crisis and the wealth gap were all factors. He added, 'And my eyes are not closed to the fact that there are people who do not like the Chinese.' However, Mulyono agreed that the perception of ethnic Chinese as wealthy and in control of the economy was understandable when Solo was viewed from street level. He was supported by others when, in effect, he excused the rioters' actions: 'Their homes (Chinese) open onto the edge of the street and for economic reasons usually their homes are also their place of work. So it is understandable if they then become a target for masses running amok.'¹²³ Adi Sasono, then Minister for Cooperatives and a senior ICMI figure, attended a meeting with other leaders in Solo in June to discuss the violence. At the meeting, attended by many who had suffered losses, Sasono advised Chinese Indonesians to engage in some introspection. It was agreed that 'care for society has more meaning than an exclusive attitude, demonstrated by building tall walls around your house'.¹²⁴

The Rape Factor

Solonese and particularly Chinese Indonesian residents, believed that open discussion or reporting of cases of sexual assault and rape during the violence would serve only to harm the community further. Whilst local community groups reported that 24 families had come to them with stories of a family member being sexually assaulted or raped during or after the violence,¹²⁵ the local police received only one official report. In response to the claims made by a 24-year-old Chinese-Indonesian woman, the local Police Chief told *Kompas*, 'The victim was only stripped and treated improperly.'¹²⁶ The victim later fled to Malaysia before the Joint Team could pursue its own investigation.¹²⁷ Despite the lack of evidence and their reluctance to report to the police, local representatives from NGOs and the Chinese-Indonesian community in Solo insisted that there were cases of sexual violence during and after the

May violence. TRuK recorded one incident of rape in Solo on 14 May 1998. The victim was raped and brutally penetrated by foreign objects (metal rods and a broken bottle) and fled overseas after the attack.¹²⁸

In its widely distributed executive summary, the Joint Team report did not conclude that cases of sexual violence occurred in Solo during the May violence.¹²⁹ Yet, in its detailed report, investigators found that the issue of rapes in Solo in mid-May had emerged during their investigation. They reported that they were presented with conflicting reports from various sections of the community, but no solid evidence was uncovered. The investigators concluded that this was due to lack of time to investigate: 'Therefore the team cannot yet be sure that rapes did or did not occur at the time of the riot. Verification is still needed in order to cross-check information circulating in the community.'¹³⁰ In addition, most of the victims were, as in Jakarta, Chinese-Indonesian women.¹³¹ As shall be investigated in the following chapter, the question of the rapes was perhaps the most controversial within Indonesian society, and for the Joint Team the most problematic.

The fact that the Joint Team was given conflicting reports, together with the virtual 'non-mention' of rape in local discussion or reporting of the violence, suggests that the rapes were considered a greater taboo in Solo than in Jakarta. In Jakarta, human rights activists were able to convince a small number of the victims to tell their stories. Apart from the one reported assault, no stories came out of the Solo experience. Even if it had been permitted to conduct further investigations, it is unclear that the Joint Team would have uncovered similar cases. In their preliminary attempts to investigate sexual violence, they found it difficult to get past the first stage of identifying cases because locals fed them contradictory stories during initial inquiries.¹³² The importance of the response of national and international media, including the Internet, to the rapes issue, cannot be overstated in relation to the profile subsequently given to the May Riots.¹³³ That stories of sexual violence in Solo did not reach headlines and webpages across the world, as they did in the case of the Jakarta violence, goes some way to explaining why Solo's May Riot was able to remain largely a local issue.

Why Was the Violence Interpreted This Way?

Sometimes ... the collective accounts we heard partook of the character of pre-emptive narratives. They were constructed, more or less consciously, in order to falsify particular 'theories' or explanations of the course of events (Gyanendra Pandey).¹³⁴

While most Chinese Indonesians and *pribumi* dismissed claims that the Solo violence, like that in Jakarta, was anti-Chinese violence, the arguments used by them to support this position, were nevertheless highly racialised. As the basis for one interpretation of the violence, locals sought to identify the composition of the victims. They pointed out that they were 'inclusive' of all ethnic groups, rather than restricted to Chinese Indonesians. They argued on the basis of statistics of losses, including shops, houses and vehicles owned by *pribumi* and Chinese Indonesians alike, and the unemployment largely suffered by *pribumi*. This information was widely available as *Solo Pos* published details of losses relating to different industry sectors regularly during May and June.

Another method of interpretation was based on assessing the emotions or intentions of those involved in the violence. The aim was to determine whether people were motivated by strong racial emotions or if their intention was to harm Chinese Indonesians. The assessment was that most of those involved were uneducated people from the lower classes, together with hoodlums and common criminals — of which, according to reports, there was an abundance in Solo¹³⁵ — and 'outsiders', a generic term used for anyone who lives outside the city of Solo, including the surrounding towns and villages. They targeted economic actors, symbols of wealth, and government and were motivated by frustration stemming from the economic crisis. With this conclusion, the Solonese found comfort and reassurance that the violence was the work of society's marginal elements frustrated by the national economic crisis, not indicative of social fissures in Solo itself. However, the question of 'racist emotion' cannot be detached from feelings of economic frustration. Many of those involved in the violence were able easily, and probably unconsciously, to make a link between the causes of their frustration and the economic advantage of Chinese Indonesians, who owned 80 per cent of shops in the city. This perception had become so much a part of the process of identification in Indonesia that the actors in the violence and those struggling to interpret it did not readily identify this association.

Two further arguments used to reject the claim of anti-Chinese violence were based on the resumption of 'normal' relations between *pribumi* and Chinese Indonesians. The kindness of their neighbours after the violence convinced Chinese Indonesians in Solo that anti-Chinese sentiment was not present among those who carried it out. Many Chinese Indonesians old enough to remember the 1965–66 or 1980 violence in Solo were adamant that nothing like the anti-Chinese

sentiment experienced then, was evident in May 1998.¹³⁶ The degree of difference between the racist sentiment expressed in the earlier incidents and the May 1998 violence was so great that it appeared to them to be a difference in kind.

The presence and identity of provocateurs before and during the violence was vital to both Chinese Indonesians and *pribumi* when rejecting the claim of anti-Chinese violence. Elite Solonese cultural and artistic leaders and the Sultan of Surakarta, dismissed this behaviour as 'out of character' for Solonese, while Amien Rais spoke of a *dalang*. Evidence that provocateurs played a part served to mitigate public responsibility and therefore any impression that Solonese were racist. For Chinese Indonesians the identity of the actors in the violence was imperative. The ability to place responsibility on perpetrators who had come from 'outside' and were controlled by a 'third party' allowed Chinese Indonesians to return to 'normality' in their day-to-day relations with *pribumis*. Each of these arguments is set within a racialised context. But rather than highlighting the presence of race and ethnicity as ingredients in the violence, as happened in respect to the Jakarta violence, the Solonese sought to dismiss it, to deny that anti-Chinese sentiment existed in Solo during the violence and, particularly it seems, to deny that true *wong* Solo were capable of feeling it.

Returning to 'Normality'

The discursive strategy of the victims is to externalise the state, and, in that way to exorcise violence. This externalisation can be interpreted as a sign that the victimised community wants to stay on in the neighbourhood and attempts to recreate the imaginary neighbourhood community by saying that an external force, the state, was the perpetrator of violence, not the neighbours (Peter van der Veer).¹³⁷

Two days of unimpeded mass violence left Solo devastated. Its infrastructure was paralysed and great psychological damage had been done to a city that prided itself on its refined culture. Indeed, many Solonese were ashamed and saddened by what had happened. In the aftermath of the violence, cultural, artistic and business community leaders recognised the need to examine racial and inter-group relations. Chinese Indonesians and *pribumi* came together to rebuild. As van der Veer observed about communities in India, they felt united by the oppression, which they believed had come from 'outside', from a 'third

force' in the form of provocateurs and *dalang*. Aided by this belief, relations between *pribumi* and Chinese Indonesians, both groups repeated, returned to 'normal' the following day. That is, they were 'no better and no worse'. But what constituted normal relations between *pribumi* and Chinese Indonesians in Solo prior to the May violence? Locals insisted that prejudice and discrimination experienced by Chinese Indonesians in Solo was 'just the same as elsewhere in Indonesia'. That is, whatever the truth of the matter might be, they were considered to be wealthier and to control the economy. They remained exclusive in their activities and lived in concentrated areas partly because they were frightened and also partly because government policies limited their access to non-commercial professions and public education. These comments also indicated that these sentiments were tolerated to the point where they were no longer remarkable or even noticeable to *pribumi* or Chinese Indonesians alike. It was simply 'normal'.

At least one Chinese Indonesian community leader believed that the explanation for the quick return to 'normality' in Solo was also related to the 'special' relationship between Chinese Indonesians and the government and military. He argued that trauma experienced by the Chinese Indonesians in Solo was largely due to the shock they felt when their guarantee of safety, for which they had paid, was not delivered. As in many towns and cities across Indonesia, the Chinese Indonesians in Solo had positioned themselves very close to members of the military and Golkar, and in doing so believed that their safety was guaranteed. When it transpired that their situation had drastically altered, their safety became once more an all-pervading concern. Chinese Indonesians in Solo became so consumed by feelings of betrayal and anger towards military and political leaders that they rejected suggestions that the *massa*, or ordinary people, were at all to blame for the violence. Rather, they blamed the elite who had failed to fulfil their contract of protection. As a consequence they harboured no ill feelings towards the 'crowds'. This violence brought a greater fear for Chinese Indonesians in Solo due to the loss of their guarantee of security.

In his study of the Bhagalpur riots and the 'fact-finding' process there, Pandey made this observation about responses by residents to this incident:

the defence of something larger and more tangible was sometimes at stake: the 'good name' of this city (or region), for example, or the very possibility of Hindus and Muslims living together in the future — as of course they must.¹³⁸

When examining representations of the May violence made by residents of Solo, what becomes clear is that *pribumi* and Chinese Indonesians were trying to protect their city from its past experiences of anti-Chinese violence, for which they continue to feel great shame. A local academic went so far as to claim, 'Solonese have anti-Chinese characteristics'.¹³⁹ The residents of Solo understood the damage such violence does to a city, the deep wounds it creates that take so long to heal. The local elite recognised that the violence was symptomatic of a deeper crisis. The people were entering a fragile and definitive period as they faced not only an economic crisis but also a crisis of identity as Javanese, as ethnic Chinese, and as modern Indonesians. Perhaps the conclusion was that Solo could not survive the division and shame that this kind of violence brought. By refusing to represent the violence as anti-Chinese in the same context as the Jakarta or 'May' violence, Solonese were attempting to hold their community together. Of course, the fact that they believed it necessary to do so reveals the deep social cleavages they were trying to conceal. Another indication of this determination to protect the fragile unity in Solo is that, like the Muslims and Hindus in Bhagalpur, few sought to cast blame upon anyone from within Solo; rather they avoided this by diverting the blame onto an unknown 'third party' and the state. Nor did they seek retribution from those deemed responsible.

The Joint Team report on the Solo violence was read by only a handful of people in Indonesia and even fewer outside the archipelago. Yet in the detailed 31-page report on the Solo riot¹⁴⁰ the investigators spoke strongly of the importance of this case for providing clues to why the violence happened nationwide. They also concluded that, for Solo, the consequences of the violence were serious:

This riot has altered the image of the Solo community as polite to an image of them as wild, destructive and uncivilised. This really represents an historical and socio-cultural tragedy for the people of Solo. More than this, this riot signals the re-emergence of a level of distrust and enmity between *pribumi* and citizens of Chinese descent. Social cleavages have become stronger and it will take a long time to repair them.¹⁴¹

In the absence of an 'official' report or political interest, the role of local residents was crucial in representing the violence to the rest of Indonesia and the world. The influential Chinese Indonesians chose to play down any ethnic aspects of the violence, declaring instead that the causes were 'multifaceted' and saying that they understood why people

might attack Chinese-Indonesian businesses because they appeared affluent. Their response was key to how the Chinese-Indonesian community in Solo perceived the violence and how they responded, and it had results. Unlike in the cases in Medan and Jakarta, most Chinese Indonesians who fled Solo during the violence returned soon after, which was essential for economic rehabilitation. In order to continue their lives in Solo, a representation of this violence as something other than anti-Chinese was essential.

In contrast, representations of the Jakarta violence as anti-Chinese, particularly by the international media, sparked an outcry from ethnic Chinese communities and human rights groups around the world, which pressured governments to respond with threats to withdraw funds and impose sanctions.¹⁴² For the small Solo community, a path that exposed divisions and ethnic animosities would be damaging. History had shown them the harm that could be done, and it was far too costly. Following the violence, student groups made attempts to bring Chinese-Indonesian and *pribumi* businesses together, community groups instituted projects to rebuild the city, and open forums discussed how such violence could be avoided in future.¹⁴³ Throughout, the common objective was to put this violent event in the past and get on with life; there was no genuine attempt to talk about the causes of the violence aside from the involvement of third parties and government agents. Despite the increased interaction and discussion among community groups, most Solo residents including students, military and community leaders failed to admit to a connection between discrimination and racism and the fact that most targets of the violence were Chinese Indonesians. As Brass wrote, 'The assumption behind such reasoning clearly is that people do not act solely on their mean prejudices, but in response to genuine and understandable grievances, the "real causes".'¹⁴⁴ It is not clear if they deliberately overlooked its importance, or if they simply could not see that it was there — that it was indeed a 'real cause'. Meanwhile, the Chinese-Indonesian community particularly children, continued to suffer from trauma. Looting and terrorising of ethnic Chinese continued in the months after the violence, but they were reluctant to report these events to the police, knowing nothing would be done to stop it.¹⁴⁵

On the first anniversary of the violence, unlike in Jakarta where ceremonies were held by victims to remember this dark period, the people of Solo did not pause to reflect or to remember. Some burnt out buildings remained as reminders of the May violence but there were remarkably few considering the extent of the damage. Solo moved

quickly to rebuild its banks, shops and factories. The sad and telling fact is that, although they returned, Chinese Indonesians moved just as quickly to rebuild fences surrounding their homes, perhaps even making them a little higher.

CONCLUSION

In the case of Indonesian criminals ... the Indonesian state imitated the criminal, striving to become like him (J.T. Siegel).¹⁴⁶

The violence in May 1998 against ethnic Chinese Indonesians was not normal or everyday. Unlike most anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia, it took place on a national scale, carried out by military agents with extreme brutality and purpose. It was an anomaly in terms of other incidents of anti-Chinese violence that had taken place under the New Order and also after its demise. However, whilst the extremity of the violence is an aberration, a unique happening, the studies here of the violence in Solo and Medan reveal the extent to which anti-Chinese sentiment, hostility and discrimination are normal characteristics of these communities. Insecurity is part of everyday life for Chinese Indonesians and buying protection is as customary as buying rice. It is necessary to survive. The validity of arguments about the discursive power of 'anti-Chinese riots' as a tool of the New Order government become clearer when seen in their local contexts. Why can anti-Chinese violence, as Heryanto argued, be used by the people to 'detach' themselves from the horror?¹⁴⁷ By the late 1990s, violence and crime were rapidly becoming 'legitimate' expressions of dissatisfaction and methods for extracting concessions in Indonesia.

The violence in May 1998 was undeniably state-sponsored and orchestrated but the scale and destruction it caused relied on the propensity of the 'crowds' to follow, to join in the violence. Antipathies associated with Chinese Indonesians' role in the economic crisis and price hikes were stirred and tended in the months leading to May 1998, as were tensions related to the political elite. Led by the students Indonesians agitated for an end to the New Order regime. The possible motives for the violence in May 1998 are not unusual in modern Indonesian history. They ranged from ethnic hatred and resentment, hunger and general lawlessness, to retribution and reprisal and the creation of chaos and subjugation by a powerful but flailing state. There were acts of anti-Chinese violence during the incidents of violence in Medan, Jakarta and

Solo. But at the same time, we can identify state-sponsored terrorism against urban poor, political violence against student dissidents, and gendered violence. Just as this event does not have a single truth and cannot be generalised across localities and time, so too its forms and therefore the labels to describe them are various.

Approaching the May violence through close studies of the incidents in Solo and Medan bolsters the view that the violence across Indonesia was linked. There is no doubt that, leading up to this period, tension was caused by economic and political turmoil. The methods used in violence, the targets, not to mention the timing, belied coincidence. Nevertheless, can this series of violent events be examined as a 'wave' of violence or even 'recurrent riots'?¹⁴⁸ The decision to include the Medan violence, which occurred a week before the 'main' violence in Jakarta and Solo, assumes a continuity that is independent of time and place. This linkage is supported by patterns of intimidation, threats, attacks on Chinese Indonesians, and 'organised' assaults, which were first identifiable in Medan in early May and were seen to recur in Jakarta and Solo. In these cases there is evidence of links between actors in both places and between the absence of security forces stationed in these cities during the unrest.

The struggle of victims and local communities to get on with their lives in the aftermath of divisive and brutal violence is overlooked in the broad version of the 'May Riots' commonly told. The Solo case shows how local interpretations and representations of this violence de-linked it from the national experience to which it was tied by time, geography and form as a means of self or community preservation. The marginality of the Solo and Medan cases in the story of May 1998 is in part because the 'facts' and their subsequent interpretations resisted easy classification or description by the media, local communities and fact-finding teams. Was it anti-Chinese violence, state terrorism or gangsterism? The 'localised' nature of the Medan violence as a battle between local *preman* and Chinese-Indonesian business clashes with the narrative of the May Riots as an elite power struggle at the nation's centre which was also fought at society's margins. Solo's violence, even though locally more damaging and devastating than that in Jakarta, had a lower profile due in part to its local representations, which downplayed its racialised nature.

5

The Aftermath: Representing and Remembering

The bloody massacre in Bangladesh quickly covered over the memory of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, the assassination of Allende drowned out the groans of Bangladesh, the war in the Sinai Desert made people forget Allende, the Cambodian massacre made people forget Sinai, and so on and so forth until ultimately everyone lets everything be forgotten (Milan Kundera).¹

Thinking Other Histories

Compiled during a national transition from authoritarian politics to *reformasi* and potential democracy, the report produced by the Joint Team reflected the tumultuous and expectant time in which it was written. Full of divisions and disputes about the scale of the destruction and the identities of perpetrators and victims, it had no tidy conclusion. Instead, it presented various narratives within the one story and admitted to its frustrations at being unable to end satisfactorily.

A close reading of the 'fragment of history'² compiled by the Joint Team challenges the narrative about the 'May violence' approved by the state that was widely accused and found to be complicit in it. Through unpacking the processes involved in compiling this report, a great deal is exposed about what took place in Jakarta and other cities in mid-May 1998. More than that, the Joint Team report tells a story of the subjectivity of truth and of suffering in the modern nation-state, and uncovers the range of possibilities within the representation of a violent incident. Much is revealed by what the Team found such difficulty in telling, in particular the story of the rapes.

The Joint Team report exposed the limitations of its authors in the face of still dominant autocratic and repressive forces, and therefore opened itself to criticisms and rejection, particularly from those eager to see faster progress on *reformasi*. Yet the significance of this story, apart from revealing much about its storytellers (some of whom were at odds with each other), comes from looking at its processes and conflicts. Along these fault lines or lines of disagreement, the politics behind controlling the story of the May violence appears. Ultimately, the Joint Team story illustrates the critical importance of controlling representations of the May violence, particularly events in Jakarta. This story also asks questions about the expectations associated with 'truth' as a means to justice which, for a nation newly struggling to face its often violent history in order to move into a peaceful future, is a critical investigation. Unfortunately, its recommendations have not been followed. Since the Joint Team report was released in November 1998, the report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women³ and the report by the Indonesian Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Violations (KPP-HAM) in East Timor have been largely rejected by subsequent governments, notwithstanding continued international pressures.

THE JOINT TEAM REPORT

Uncovering the truth is seen as an act of humiliation for Indonesia before the international community.⁴

The violence of May 1998 brought terror to the entire nation. Its victims were mainly women, urban poor and Chinese Indonesians,⁵ but the audacity and impunity assumed by its perpetrators shocked all of Indonesia and much of the international community. In the months following Suharto's resignation, Indonesia was a nation filled with great hopes for its newly claimed democratic future, but it was already visibly struggling to identify how it should best deal with the past. Notions of 'truth' and 'reconciliation' were only just beginning to enter the national discourse, and even then they were 'unknowns'. At the same time, dealing with the violence and comprehending it was extremely difficult. The May violence exceeded limits of what was perceived as justifiable or explainable, in particular with regard to understandings of anti-Chinese violence and state oppression. In response to this, in July 1998 President Habibie chose the Joint Team as the means to produce the 'truth' about the 13–14 May violence and, in particular, to identify

the perpetrators. 'Fact finding' was a familiar method of 'truth seeking' employed in Indonesia under the New Order. The National Commission for Human Rights (Komnas HAM) had been established in 1991 to placate international protests by investigating the massacre at Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, East Timor and it had since launched numerous fact-finding investigations into human rights abuses. The support of the government, however, ended there. 'Finding justice' for victims was another story.

The attempt at fact finding about the violence in Jakarta and other cities demonstrates the power to be gained by having a monopoly not only on violence within a state, but also over 'representations' of that violence.⁶ That years later no one has been brought to trial or even charged reveals the extent to which the search ran contrary to the wishes of the government and military elite, even in post-Suharto Indonesia. The results were such that, even after the Joint Team finally reached a consensus on its contents and conclusions, the report was rejected by the military, ignored by the government,⁷ and contested by sections of the national media.⁸

The search for the truth about the Jakarta violence can be described as a dual struggle to name both victims and perpetrators. At times, the two struggles could not easily be separated. The Joint Team's failure to identify the perpetrators of this violence, together with the further harm that the failure meant to the victims, reveals the need to find alternative ways of facing history in Indonesia. As an attempt at public 'truth seeking', the Joint Team was perhaps the most ambitious in Indonesia to date. The scale of the task confronting its members was matched by expectations held by members of the team, the victims, the international community and the Indonesian public; expectations that the truth, once known, would lead to justice.

Naming the Victims: Stumbling Over Numbers

Any production of truth is reflective of an ongoing battle for power and temporary consensus.⁹

The most controversial issue arising from the violence was the rapes. It was certainly most problematic for the Joint Team as they grappled with determining the number of victims. The Joint Team considered data from numerous outside groups as well as that collected by the members themselves. These reports varied widely in the definition of rape and the

processes of verification, which made assessment complicated. Another problem was the composition of the team itself. The presence of members of the police and the military on the Joint Team made most victims, particularly those who had suffered sexual assault, reluctant to testify, because they believed that certain of the security officials were complicit. Consequently, there was concern that the pursuit of hard evidence regarding the rapes could lead to prosecutions being handled by possible perpetrators. The same concerns applied to certain prominent figures in politics and society who might also be involved in the prosecutions. In either case, victims saw giving testimony as having the potential to endanger their lives or cause further trauma.¹⁰ Such reluctance made it clear to many Joint Team members that the true number of rape or sexual violence victims would never be known.

At the same time that Joint Team members were setting about their task of finding and analysing data, comments made by religious leaders, journalists and members of parliament challenged the veracity of the rapes and threatened to undermine the fact-finding process.¹¹ Islamic groups like the Indonesian Preachers Coordinating Agency (*Badan Koordinasi Mubaligh se-Indonesia*, Bakomubin) protested that the rape cases were being used to discredit Islam. Its leader Toto Tasmara met with President Habibie in late July 1998 to oppose media claims that the rapists had shouted 'Allah is Great' and made statements like 'You must be raped because you are Chinese and non-Muslim' during attacks. Tasmara claimed that it was part of a political conspiracy to discredit Islam.¹² It was also reported that at a meeting between some Joint Team members and a parliamentary committee to discuss the report on 24 September, great opposition to the rapes claims came from members of a particular parliamentary faction. These public attacks were potentially so damaging that Saparinah Sadli, the leader of the team for Victims' Facts, who was responsible for the data on victims of sexual violence, was compelled to issue an Open Letter to counter the negative voices increasingly asking, 'Did the rapes actually happen?' and demanding victims step forward to prove it.¹³

Local human rights groups such as TRuK and their leaders became celebrities, and the debate over the veracity of the rape reports became a major story. There was strong media and public interest over a TRuK report issued in June stating that it had counted 168 victims of rape. In retrospect, Sandyawan concedes that the group was too hasty in making the figure public and somewhat naive in its expectations of how the story would be covered.¹⁴ The work of these volunteers in assisting

victims of the violence was met with hostility and further violence. On 9 October 1998 an 18-year-old TRuK member named Marthadinata was murdered in her home. Although police insisted that the murder was a purely criminal case and promptly produced a suspect in the form of a male neighbour, TRuK leaders believed that her death, which came just a week before the release of the Joint Team report, was linked to her work with victims. Sandyawan also believes that Marthadinata may have been a victim of rape. She was murdered days before she was to leave for the US to testify about the rapes.¹⁵ Until the murder, TRuK members had been prepared to speak to the media on these issues; afterwards they became guarded in their comments, opting instead for a quiet approach in assisting victims and their families.

The Joint Team was already divided over methods of verification and collection of data about victims of sexual violence. Now the dispute was compounded by the public and political debate. On one side were the police, military and supporters of the verification process known as the Jakarta Protocol — the name chosen by its implementers, the Indonesian Doctors' Association — in which a doctor's confirmation of assault was required. On the other side were those who supported procedures accepting evidence on behalf of the victim from third parties such as eyewitnesses and members of the victims' family, while protecting those parties' identities. The debate over these standards was clearly influenced by the wider public discourse about the rapes and it forced the Joint Team to delay the release of the final report.

At the last minute, the team reached a compromise: the final report would state that two sets of figures on the number of victims of sexual violence existed. The first set were cases that had been verified under the Jakarta Protocol, totalling 15 rapes. In the second set were 37 rapes, as verified by data from victims' families, psychologists, religious clerics and eyewitnesses. In total, the Joint Team found 52 rapes, 14 rapes with torture, 10 cases of sexual violence and torture, and nine cases of sexual harassment. As a further concession to those Joint Team members who disagreed with the content of the Victims' Facts sub-team report, including Rosita Noer (Secretary of the Joint Team), Bambang Widjojanto (leading member of the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation, YLBHI) and numerous ABRI representatives on the team,¹⁶ the Final Report included neither the sub-team's finding that the sexual violence was planned, nor the alternative explanation that the violence was just an 'excess of the riot'. Rather, the report stated that it simply could not be determined whether the rapes occurred spontaneously or were a part of engineered violence.

The report did conclude, however, that the sexual violence was another facet of the riot activities, together with looting, burning, kidnapping, and torture.¹⁷

With respect to the total number of victims of all other violence, the Joint Team reached a compromise much more easily than it had on the emotional issue of rape. In its assessment of the numbers in these categories, the team again articulated the extreme difficulty of finding consensus either on methods of verification or one set of accurate data on the numbers of victims. As a solution, the Final report again stated that multiple sets of figures existed. The numbers differed in the extreme: TRuK data estimated that 1,109 had died in fires, 27 had been shot dead, and 91 had been wounded; Police reported 451 dead and no wounded; the district military command gave 463 dead, 69 wounded; and the Jakarta regional government just 288 dead and 101 wounded. While this compromise again allowed for the possibility that the true number of victims was greater than that recorded in the report,¹⁸ the damage had been done. By transforming the battle to name the victims into a debate over numbers, the report sacrificed representation of the victims as human beings and individuals.

Naming the Perpetrators: State-sponsored Violence

The disagreement over the numbers of victims and especially the rape victims marred what were, by Indonesian standards, unprecedented conclusions regarding the involvement of the armed forces and political elite in the violence. In fact, the Joint Team pulled few punches when it came to analysing the role of the security forces. Specifically, it found that the Armed Forces had failed to anticipate the riot, that there was a lack of adequate communications between those in command and those on the ground, and that, as a consequence, the forces had responded tardily in most cases and sometimes not at all. Furthermore, in some instances, security officers had even 'permitted riots to occur'.¹⁹ Responsibility for security in Jakarta at that time was in the hands of elite members of ABRI who, the report argued, had failed to provide sufficient and consistent instruction to officers on the ground. As a result, security officers on the street were confused as to the nature of commands and, at the same time, overwhelmed by the size of the mobs they confronted. The Joint Team conceded that some security agents faced a 'psychological dilemma' when confronted with the need to take action against citizens. This, the report reasoned, was partially due to the

fact that, according to Armed Forces (ABRI) doctrine, citizens are not enemies and therefore should not be shot at.²⁰ Furthermore, they advised ongoing investigation into suspicions that the violence had come about as a result of a challenge on Suharto's presidency from within the military.

Nonetheless, the evidence the Joint Team collected led it to conclude that there was a 'security vacuum' in Jakarta during the days of the riots. The team called for further investigation, specifically into the role of the Operations Commander for Greater Jakarta (Pangkoops Jaya), Maj. Gen. TNI Syafrie Sjamsoeddin. They also sought investigation of then Lt. Gen. Prabowo Subianto, head of Kostrad, for his suspected role in the violence. Furthermore, the Joint Team singled out key events about which it sought more information. For example, several Armed Forces officials and prominent figures, including Prabowo, met at the Kostrad Command Headquarters (Makostrad) on the evening of 14 May 1998; the Joint Team suspected that some organisation of the violence occurred or was discussed. The Joint Team concluded that the violence was linked to people at the country's 'highest levels' of decision-making, and that it was part of 'an effort to create a critical situation that required a form of extra-constitutional government to control the entire situation'.²¹ Finally, despite access to elite figures and the participation of the police and the military, the Joint Team — although tantalisingly close — was compelled to admit that a link between the highest levels of politics and military with the rioters on the street was still missing.

The Politics of Naming the Perpetrators: A Path to Justice?

Difficulties existed in uncovering the logic and facts in order to find the way to evidence, which was more specific. Apart from this, from a moral angle, it was certainly difficult to find answers as to why people would plan and organise a riot that would claim so many victims (Joint Team).²²

The struggle to represent and tell the story of the May 1998 violence was driven by great expectations that the naming of the perpetrators would be a step along the path to justice and truth. President Habibie established the fact-finding team explicitly with the task of revealing the identities of those responsible. From the outset, Habibie himself focused the investigation on this aim: 'I particularly ask the Armed Forces leadership to reveal the truth over the allegations that an organised group

was seen inciting the people to burn and loot buildings in several areas where disturbances occurred.’²³ Many Indonesians, particularly the victims of the violence, concluded that the report did not achieve this goal. Despite its suspicions that such were to be found, the Joint Team failed to produce unequivocal facts about the involvement of key figures. Its report presented not one overall truth but rather multiple and highly contested truths.

The Joint Team’s search for the missing link to back its suspicions with facts was hindered by the conditions of the investigation, which was under the ultimate control of those in positions of political power. Therefore, the perpetrators were never properly named, although the reaction of senior members of the military and the government to the final report might suggest that the Joint Team was nearing the truth. Also, it is conceivable that it was never within the power of the Joint Team, even without its political divisions, to achieve the result for which victims and their supporters hoped. Judge Richard J. Goldstone argued that achieving justice after mass violence is almost impossible: ‘It should be recognized that in a perfect society victims are entitled to full justice, namely trial of the perpetrator and, if found guilty, adequate punishment. That ideal is not possible in the aftermath of massive violence. There are simply too many victims and too many perpetrators.’²⁴

The attempt to name the perpetrators of Indonesia’s violence was a struggle against insurmountable odds, precisely because the trail of evidence pointed to the highest echelons of Indonesian politics and the military. A closer examination of the Joint Team’s attempts to prove what its members suspected reinforces this. The Joint Team’s members had to cope with recalcitrant military and political figures who were aware of the potential damage to their own careers, with reluctant witnesses equally afraid of the consequences of telling the truth, and also hard-to-identify shadowy but ambitious third parties with political and military links.

Trying to Find the ‘Missing Link’ Between the Provocateurs and the Government

It is clear from the victims that they were incited by groups very well trained for looting A testimony from one of the urban poor is that there was one particular trooper/soldier who carried a jerry can and disappeared from the scene in a vehicle that was clearly identified (Sandyawan SJ).²⁵

Certainly there were agitators who ‘played’, however I cannot say if there is intelligence data to support this (Governor of Jakarta, Sutiyoso).²⁶

To be frank, I am not your mastermind (Prabowo Subianto).²⁷

The Joint Team had sufficient evidence to suspect the involvement of elite members of the military and the government in the violence. The evidence clearly pointed to provocateurs and *preman* (thugs) as having military-type skills. Some of the provocateurs who were apprehended and questioned, testified that they had been trained and under Prabowo’s command. The Joint Team also had a clear picture of the perpetrators active on the streets from the countless stories told to the press, human rights groups, and government authorities by witnesses from across Jakarta, who described certain individuals consistently.²⁸ One person commonly described was involved in the violence as a provocateur or in a more active role. Witnesses described him as a fit, muscular man with cropped hair (although sometimes it was very long) and wearing army-style boots. He was variously dressed in civilian clothes, school or university shirts, or in a black uniform. They described him as skilled at throwing molotov bombs and stones with great accuracy, able to use an iron bar to wrench open shop doors with precision, and to light fires and jump off walls and roofs effortlessly.²⁹ He often rode a motorbike in a group of approximately ten others or arrived in a pick-up truck or minibus, and always appeared suddenly. He was not known locally but had a very good knowledge of the local area.³⁰

Despite such evidence and the Joint Team’s suspicions about the role of some elite military officials in the violence, it was still insufficient to uncover the crucial link. During August–September 1998 the Joint Team conducted interviews with top military, intelligence, and local and national government figures. Among those of particular interest were former head of Kostrad, Prabowo Subianto; Operations Commander for Greater Jakarta (Pangkoops Jaya), Syafrie Sjamsoeddin; Commander of ABRI Intelligence Branch (*Badan Intelijen ABRI*, BIA), Zaki Anwar Makarim; and Governor of Jakarta, Sutiyoso.³¹ These men and others were questioned about their movements during the unrest, the activities of troops under their command, and what they had understood to be taking place at the time. Yet, despite being elite members of the armed forces in positions of command, these men recalled surprisingly little of those days in May. In fact, they insisted on knowing almost nothing about security conditions in the nation’s capital at the time in question.

Governor Sutiyoso, a former Pangkoops Jaya, said that he followed the news of the violence on television and admitted to knowing less about the events than members of the Joint Team.³² Makarim testified that, following his agency's intelligence gathering, he had issued an 'early warning' to the authorities that a disturbance would take place in Jakarta sometime around 13–20 May 1998.³³ He explained that, when the students were shot at Trisakti University on 12 May, sparking the violence, the agency was caught off guard.

For his part, Prabowo testified that from 14–20 May troops were brought into the city from other parts of Indonesia but of their number and their movements he could not be sure: 'Quite a lot, but not all at once, they came and went....'³⁴ Prabowo attributed all responsibility for command of security operations in the city to local Operations Commander Syafrie, claiming that he himself had no authority over the operation. Prabowo said he had repeatedly questioned Syafrie about the absence of troops. In March 2001 when appearing before a special parliamentary committee on the Trisakti killings, Prabowo maintained a similar argument regarding the line of command. He claimed he could not explain precisely why Kostrad marksmen were on the streets near the university at the time of the killings, saying that this operation was under Syafrie's command.³⁵ The vague testimony by the military and intelligence leaders proved to be too great an obstacle to the Joint Team's investigations. These prominent figures were reluctant to answer questions and most surely held back the complete truth. As a result, the team was left with no firm evidence to verify its suspicions of elite involvement, but they were frustratingly close to naming the perpetrators.

Who's Afraid of the Missing Link?

The testimony provided by the Army's chief of intelligence, Makarim, and his failure to assist the Joint Team by providing intelligence about the violence was key to why they were unable to find this 'missing link'. Firstly, the intelligence agencies failed to assist the team by providing information they would undoubtedly have collected. Joint Team members who attended his interview said Makarim was reluctant to even provide them with information about the procedures of the agencies. In response to questions about BIA's knowledge of the violence, keeping in mind that the agency had issued an early warning that violence could occur, Makarim testified that after 12 May when 'war broke out' in Jakarta, the tasks of the intelligence agencies changed. He claimed that, as a

consequence, they failed to collect intelligence during the violence itself: 'Our only remaining task was to assist the troops in the field ... we did not have troops, that is what happened in the field, so after the war broke out, intelligence did what they could, but it was not a maximum....'³⁶

In his testimony, Syafrie presented what the Joint Team judged to be a weak explanation of his activities and of those of his troops who were supposed to be protecting the city. Regarding the presence or 'absence' of security forces at locations where violence occurred, he testified that a contingency programme existed for the city during crises such as that in mid-May. This meant, he said, that the security forces were committed to protecting 'priority locations'. According to Syafrie, these included the homes of foreign diplomats, embassies, campuses, the parliamentary complex, television stations, print media factories and electricity, fuel and water supplies. He then attempted to explain why most of the city was left unprotected:

Because the strength of troops were not able to be moved to other places where incidents occurred, from time to time there were those who were directed to other places, but we did not have a certain mobility. Apart from that, during the events of 13–14 May there were still incidents in central and strategic locations also, like incidents at the parliament....³⁷

Again the Joint Team were unconvinced that the Operations Commander was being open and, in its Final Report, recommended that Syafrie be made accountable for his activities. The inability of the Joint Team to detail troop movements and therefore its failure to adequately explain the security vacuum in Indonesia's capital resulted in an absence of 'facts' to either rule out the involvement of those agencies or to implicate them.

Membership of police and military in the Joint Team made it most unlikely that some of the thugs and provocateurs who carried out the violence would reveal on record what they had stated off it. Off the record, some of these individuals acknowledged that they had been trained for the deeds they executed in May by elements of the military and said they were under the command of either Prabowo or Wiranto.³⁸ Yet this source of evidence was barely examined due to the reluctance of these people to testify. Furthermore, the police were unwilling to capture, charge, and question them, as doing so would potentially expose their commanders as the 'brains' behind the violence. In testimony before the Joint Team, intelligence agent Aris Sampurno stated that Jakarta police had identified only 36 rioters and arrested 16 suspects.³⁹

Similarly, and perhaps even more frustratingly for some Joint Team members, witness testimonies that the security forces took an active part in the violence and often directed it were largely disregarded by the verification team and omitted from the final report.⁴⁰ In a letter to *Asiaweek* in response to its article about Prabowo titled 'The Scapegoat?', Fr. Sandyawan Sumardi recounted three testimonies made to his group describing the involvement of security agents in the Jakarta violence. In one account, a taxi driver testified that he had seen five military helicopters hovering over Ciledug shopping centre in South Jakarta and that shots were fired from the helicopter into the air and rioters commanded not to 'hesitate to loot'.⁴¹

Some Elite, A Few Generals and 14 May⁴²

Other factors also contributed to the 'undoing' of some of the gains the Joint Team believed it had made in linking key figures from the military and elsewhere to the violence. In particular, statements to the press by high profile figures who attended the Makostrad (Kostrad Command Headquarters) meeting on 14 May were damaging. These included Rendra, prominent Indonesian writer and poet, Adnan Buyung Nasution, leading defence and human rights lawyer and Bambang Widjojanto, a member of the Joint Team, who, following the release of the final report told the media that they had witnessed nothing at the Makostrad meeting to confirm the Joint Team's suspicions. Rendra commented that the Joint Team was making a 'big deal' about the meeting: 'It seems that it has been dramatised',⁴³ and Bambang described the meeting as 'informal', adding, 'We asked Prabowo about the problem of the kidnappings and he swore that he was not involved.'⁴⁴ Bambang later admitted publicly that the conclusions of the Joint Team about the Makostrad meeting were not unanimous.⁴⁵ These statements reported in the media, together with details of the final hours of bickering amongst members of the Joint Team, contributed greatly at the time to discrediting the entire Joint Team report in the minds of many Indonesians. However, two years later, Bambang Widjojanto was perhaps less sure of his assessment of the events at the Makostrad that night, conceding 'I myself also questioned why so many people ran to Prabowo, not to the Pangdam (Regional Commander). I also don't know if beforehand there was a similar meeting at Makostrad or not.' Rendra also later expressed his doubts, 'I don't know if another meeting took place there.'⁴⁶ Prabowo's known connections with Muslim fundamentalist

groups including KISDI and its leader Fadli Zon, who had been involved in anti-Chinese agitation in January–February 1998, drew further suspicions of his involvement. However, the Joint Team were ultimately unable to produce evidence to support these suspicions.

The testimony by Prabowo Subianto to the Joint Team was certainly not a complete account of his activities during the violence. Two years later, he recalled a great deal more in interviews with *Asiaweek* magazine, *Tempo* magazine,⁴⁷ and in statements directly or indirectly (via his father and brother) to the media.⁴⁸ In these revealing accounts, Prabowo states, among other things, that when he called the Commander of the Armed Forces, Wiranto, no less than eight times before a scheduled meeting in Malang on 14 May to persuade him to postpone the meeting, Wiranto replied, the ‘show must go on’.⁴⁹ There is the belief that Gen. Wiranto was aware of the threat Prabowo posed and in fact called the meeting precisely to keep Prabowo out of Jakarta. To *Asiaweek*, Prabowo gave a blow-by-blow account of his actions from the 12 May until Suharto’s resignation on 21 May, sometimes even giving precise times. This is in stark contrast to the sometimes muddled account he presented to the Joint Team. In his interview with *Asiaweek*, Prabowo insisted that not he but Buyung Nasution and other figures had called the Makostad meeting, at which time he refuted their questioning of his possible involvement in the violence, the Trisakti shootings and the kidnappings. In his interview with the Joint Team, Prabowo made no mention of this when recounting his movements on the 13, 14 and 15 May. A question remains about Prabowo’s innocence and the truth of his more recent accounts of events. However, his failure to provide detailed information to the Joint Team during its investigation inevitably contributed to further suspicion of his role. It also prevented the Joint Team investigation from closing in on the ‘missing link’ which, given Prabowo’s recent testimonies (if they could be verified), might have turned their attention to other figures. At the same time it is undeniable that some members of the Joint Team, like the public, had more or less tried Prabowo before the facts could be examined, although the head of the Joint Team, Marzuki Darusman, did also urge caution, saying that Prabowo should not be the only suspect.⁵⁰

Naming Prabowo: A Solution or a Diversion?

Yes, the aim of the riot is to bring down the regime (Prabowo Subianto).⁵¹

Suspicion had fallen on Prabowo almost immediately due mainly to his known role in the kidnapping of political activists as leader of the Kopassus in early 1998. As noted, President Suharto had transferred him to Commander of Kostrad at the end of March 1998.⁵² The Joint Team uncovered sufficient evidence to suspect that Prabowo had been involved in the violence in mid-May. They pointed to his role at the Makostrad meeting on 14 May,⁵³ which the Joint Team believed was crucial to exposing the 'missing link' between the violence and elite political conflict. They suspected that, at this meeting, attended by key military figures as well as Islamic leaders including Fadli Zon, some 'organisation' or discussion of the violence took place. In their final report, they called on the government to investigate further this meeting and Prabowo's role in it as a means to exposing the elite machinations behind the violence.⁵⁴

On 22 May 1998, a day after President Suharto resigned, Prabowo was transferred to a non-active position in the military as Head of the Armed Forces Staff Command School (Sesko Abri) in Bandung. Both Wiranto and Prabowo denied that the move was a disciplinary action.⁵⁵ However, just over a month later the Military Council of Honour named Prabowo as a target of investigation regarding his role in the kidnappings of student activists in early 1998. During the investigation, Prabowo maintained that he had been directed to carry out the kidnappings by his then superiors, Armed Forces Commander Lt. Gen. Feisal Tanjung and Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Wiranto.⁵⁶ The Military Council dismissed his claims, insisting that Prabowo had 'analysed' incorrectly whatever order he was given and on 24 August 1998 he was discharged from military service.⁵⁷ By the time Prabowo met with Joint Team members in early September to testify about the May violence, he was already the subject of intense public condemnation with speculation that he was responsible for the Trisakti killings. Soon after, he fled Indonesia, and his whereabouts were unknown until it was discovered in December 1998 that he had sought what he termed asylum in Jordan as a guest of the King. For many, Prabowo's fleeing rendered him instantly guilty of involvement in the May violence and of being the mastermind of a greater plan to destabilise the nation.⁵⁸

From the outset, Prabowo insisted he was innocent, that he was not the *dalang* behind the violence but rather had been made a scapegoat.⁵⁹ Although the Joint Team had singled out Prabowo and Syafrie for particular investigation, in Prabowo's case the media and public rumour had tried and convicted him in advance. This was an indication of how desperately the Indonesian public required a culprit

for the violence. As a man of known brutality and ambition, Prabowo was a highly suitable candidate. Prabowo was aware of this public perception when he visited the home of one of the students killed at Trisakti, Hery Hartanto. Before Hartanto's parents, Prabowo held a copy of the Koran above his head and swore that he did not order the shootings. Hartanto's father was affected by the gesture saying that after the display he believed that Prabowo was not involved.⁶⁰

It is puzzling that Syafrie escaped the same level of public trial. Syafrie was, after all, in command of military operations in the Greater Jakarta area.⁶¹ The role of the intelligence bodies was also not scrutinised by the Indonesian public or the Joint Team. In interviews with the Joint Team, various members of the intelligence agencies insisted that they could not reveal information about the processes of intelligence collection. Furthermore, despite their impressive networks, they testified that they had no prior knowledge of the violence save for vague rumours that something would occur around the 20 May.

Final Concessions

Why would I want to sign something that I don't know? (Rosita Noer, Secretary of Joint Team)⁶²

The manoeuvring and conflict during the final days and hours before the report was released overshadowed the major achievements of the Joint Team in uncovering the perpetrators and the role of the armed forces. Numerous members, including ABRI representatives Bambang Widjojanto and Rosita Noer, refused to sign the document until concessions were made on disputed issues, particularly the numbers of rape victims and the Makostrad meeting on 14 May. In addition, before the final report could be released, a concession was made to some team members who required that 'Notes of Objection' be included at the end of the report before they signed it. Various team members from the Police, Ministry for Internal Affairs, and Ministry for Foreign Affairs objected to specific wording or statements. In all, 7 objections were made by 4 of the 18 members.⁶³ Notably, other members of the team from the military and government chose not to make any objections. Given that the final report was compiled with all members present, and that the report was written sentence by sentence, it is remarkable that so few objections were made.⁶⁴ For example, no objection was made to the overall conclusion that the violence occurred in an environment of elite political struggle, or to the assessments and

recommendations relating to Syafrie and Prabowo. Details as to military and police involvement, their lack of action to protect citizens, and the evidence presented that the violence resembled a military-style campaign were also not contested.

That all parties within the Joint Team agreed that there was some link between the elite and the violence on the street but were unable to identify that link had several implications. First, long after the original events and the release of the Joint Team report, some of the suspected masterminds of the violence remained in powerful positions. Perhaps the greatest omission by both the Joint Team and the public was not to question Gen. Wiranto. The power struggle between Prabowo and Wiranto was, many believe, a trigger for the riots. This, and the failure to investigate figures such as Intelligence chief Makarim, represented a grave missed opportunity. Numerous reports about the massacres around the time of the East Timor referendum, only 12 months after the May 1998 violence, observed that as commander of the armed forces Wiranto bore at least partial responsibility.⁶⁵ The Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Violations in East Timor (*Komisi Penyelidik Pelanggaran HAM*, KPP HAM) named Wiranto as involved and soon after he was forced to resign from his position as Minister for Defence in President Abdurrahman Wahid's cabinet and to take early retirement from the military. However, he was not charged by the ad hoc human rights court established to try violations in East Timor. It is worth bearing in mind that the KPP HAM report and others also note the involvement of Makarim, Syafrie, and Feisal Tanjung in the killings in East Timor. If, as many suspected at the time, they had been found to have acted improperly in some way in the May violence, these men would not have occupied positions of power in relation to security in East Timor.⁶⁶

The failure to clarify the connection of these elite figures with the violence — and perhaps even bring about their removal from office — left victims unable to trust figures of authority even under subsequent democratic governments. Others, who had suffered at the hands of the state in previous years, but allowed themselves to feel hope with the Joint Team, had their hopes dashed when the report was released. The fears were not alleviated and they largely ceased to hope that justice would be attained. For these people, the new era of supposed *reformasi* or transitional government was already failing. Many Chinese Indonesians and female victims of sexual violence who might otherwise have been prepared to return to Indonesia chose not to do so, largely because of

the disappointing outcome of the report and specifically to the sentiments within society exposed by the debate about the veracity of the rapes. In wider society and politics, the failure to prove the involvement of figures suspected of being so-called *dalang* and 'third parties' (or even communist) meant that the perpetrators' identities remained hidden.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the failure to identify the perpetrators and organisers of the violence was the inability to locate responsibility for the terror that the violence instilled throughout the nation as a whole. Although naming Prabowo fulfilled some of this need, assigning responsibility for this social calamity to a single individual was not enough, the more so given that he had left the country. Geared as the investigation was toward finding a culprit or someone to blame, the focus of attention shifted from the victimisers to the victims: the urban poor, women, and Chinese Indonesians. Rather than offering these individuals assistance, compassion, and reconciliation, some in the media, the Joint Team, the police, and the justice system chose instead to lay the blame for what had taken place on them or, most horrifyingly, to deny their experience as authentic in the first place.

The Politics of Naming the Victims: Reflections on a Nation

The victims were subjects who experienced destruction of property and wealth, death or loss of self-respect as a result of the events of the riot. The riot victims were generally characterised across ethnic and class lines.⁶⁷

The debate about whether or not there were rapes has destructive tendencies. There is very strong evidence to prove that other violence which was organised took place, like looting and burning houses and shops (Sidney Jones, Human Rights Watch Asia).⁶⁸

The acts of violence and terror experienced by Chinese Indonesians, urban poor and women revealed what the Joint Team described as 'a nation in decline' (*bangsa menjadi mundur*).⁶⁹ According to them, Indonesia had abandoned the tenets of its nationhood as set down by the fathers of independence, of unity in diversity. Yet, despite the struggles of the investigators to understand how Indonesia had fallen into such social division, animosity and hatred, the victims' suffering continued.

The response of the Indonesian public and government authorities to the victims of violence revealed lingering prejudices toward people of other social categories. They were marginalised from the outset and their

stories, which had the potential to reveal most humanly the consequences of violence, were drowned out in the debate over numbers and semantics. Giving full consideration to the identity of the victims was critical. Their treatment by society after the violence revealed the inadequacies of a future Indonesian nationalism emerging from the tumultuous, and celebratory, times that surrounded Suharto's downfall. For the victims of the May 1998 violence, especially those who were raped, post-Suharto Indonesia forfeited moral authority in its efforts to deal with them. The social and political response was similarly inadequate for the other categories of victims, that is Chinese Indonesians and urban poor. In all cases, the inadequacies were due in no small part to the fact that the struggle to understand the violence became mired in the issue of naming perpetrators.

Writing about those who suffered from kidnap, torture, and rape in 1998, Ariel Heryanto argued eloquently that a gendered distinction was made between different 'victims' in Indonesian society, even in the midst of '*reformasi* fever'. Focusing on the kidnap victims meant 'the bodily wounds of these activists — all of them males — were publicly endowed with a degree of political heroism'.⁷⁰ In contrast, the female rape victims never received such public sympathy and praise. Rather, as Heryanto pointed out, they were stigmatised and marginalised, a response that grew out of social constructions of femininity and the values imposed on the female body, such as chastity and virginity. It could be said that they were virtually subjected to a 'second rape' by society at large. An article by Antara Newsagency reporter Sri Muryono titled 'Did Rapes Actually Happen?' published in the *Republika* newspaper on 2 August 1998 epitomised this response. Its author was sceptical about whether the rapes had occurred and called for the victims to come forward to 'prove' their claims. Saparinah Sadli, head of the Joint Team Victims Sub-Team, responded to the article with an open letter — and later reiterated her comments in public — stating that the opinions in the original piece were 'bound to have a negative social impact' and were 'dangerous, as they shy away from the horrifying reality'.⁷¹

The urban poor and Chinese-Indonesian victims were similarly denied the status of national heroes in the aftermath. Social constructions and prejudices played a role here, too, but rather than gender it was ethnicity and class that was the focus. These people were regarded as anomalies or imperfect ambassadors for Indonesia and Indonesian identity in the nationalist discourse: Chinese Indonesians because of their 'foreign' ethnicity and the urban poor because their poverty lingered in an

Indonesia driven by developmentalism and modernity. Like those of the female victims, the images presented by each of these groups were an embarrassment. Yet, despite the fall of the New Order regime, and after the May violence, these social constructions based on masculinity, the sanctity of the female body, and an Indonesian nationality continued to dominate understandings of both the victims and the perpetrators.

CONCLUSION

If those six students were heroes of reform, then my family is a victim of reform (Pak Chairul, 44-year-old shopkeeper whose wife and two daughters burnt to death in their home during the violence in Jakarta in May 1998).⁷²

This is watershed period for the Indonesian Chinese. The riots, looting, burning and rapes on May 13–14 have left them bewildered, rudderless and desperate (Jusuf Wanandi).⁷³

The Joint Team's report was a highly problematic representation of the predominantly Jakarta-based violence in May 1998. Yet, it must also be recognised as the best available account of those events. In terms of Indonesian national history, the report was a unique document precisely because its account was flawed. These flaws were evident in the sense that the political fault lines within the team that created it — and those within society in general — were clear. This was unlike other national histories created under the New Order about which no debate could take place. Furthermore, the report's representation of a violent event introduced the Indonesian public to the notion of multiple truths. There are also more tangible legacies. For the first time, an official account of violence in Indonesia suggested that members of the Indonesian government and military may have engineered and perpetrated it. The report acknowledged the state-sponsored terrorism that had caused such pain and suffering for all Indonesians, especially Chinese Indonesians, women, and the urban poor. It also boldly issued recommendations to government and military about their conduct and how to deal with perpetrators and victims.

Nevertheless, a single truth dominated in Indonesian society, which represented the violence as state orchestrated and as 'racialised' rather than racist. This interpretation allowed Chinese-Indonesian communities in Solo and elsewhere to return to their lives. To quote Aguilar, 'Had there been no statist hands behind the rampage and the rapes, coming

to terms with these ugly episodes might have been more difficult.⁷⁴ But it also enabled the Indonesian government to avoid crucial issues related to discrimination and anti-Chinese prejudice.

Undoubtedly the violence affected individual Chinese Indonesians in different ways. There were those who were direct victims of the violence, as well as those who were not; those who fled Indonesia, and those who stayed. In the 'wash up' of this turbulent period, there were those who emerged with a sense of empowerment and a desire to express their ethnic identity and those who remained cautious, wary and traumatised. For Indonesia's future the outcome was crucial. Economists suggested that the return of Chinese-Indonesian business held the key to ending the economic crisis, which continued to devastate the country.⁷⁵ The negative after-effects of being unable to identify the perpetrators of this violence or find an alternative path to some form of justice continue to be seen in Indonesian politics.

6

Regime Change and Transition

History is cyclical, but nobody seems to learn from it
(Onghokham).¹

Suharto's resignation opened the way for regime change and, as many Indonesians had hoped, for democracy. Although Habibie's succession as President was greeted with caution because of his long and close relationship with Suharto and the New Order, Indonesia had begun on an irreversible path of transition. By early 1999 the structures and institutions of the New Order had been greatly weakened yet the composition and structures of the new regime were still being negotiated. It was a time of great hope and expectation but also a period of high uncertainty and worsening instability. Economic conditions remained difficult and the rapid deterioration of law and order saw conflicts break out in various places across the archipelago. Separatist struggles intensified in Aceh, Papua and East Timor, where thousands were killed and displaced by government-backed militia in the wake of the September 1999 referendum; gruesome ethnic violence flared between Dayaks and Madurese in West and Central Kalimantan; and bloody religious strife between Christians and Muslims in Maluku and Central Sulawesi left thousands dead and communities deeply divided. In January 1999, the *Jakarta Post* conducted a poll asking how Indonesians perceived their levels of security: 77 per cent of respondents rated public safety levels as bad or very bad.²

Indonesians began to question the very founding principles of their nation. What did Pancasila nationalism mean to them and where should they situate ethnicity within it? The taboos associated with the SARA issues of ethnicity, religion, race and intergroup relations began

to be challenged by open discussion and debate. The discursive association of these taboo topics with conflict and division was used to mobilise groups, often violently. Munir, then head of the Commission for Disappeared and Victims of Violence (*Komisi untuk Orang Hilang dan Korban Tindak Kekerasan*, KontraS), explained the increase in violence after Suharto's resignation as the result of regime change and the manipulation by contending political forces:

The culture of violence which is now occurring is a process where there is an open situation but the level of political awareness among the people is also weak, so people are easily incited and played off against each other — as a choice of political communication. Consequently conflicts become widespread.³

The scale of the violence taking place elsewhere at this time, particularly the bloody clashes between Christians and Muslims in Ambon and against Madurese in Kalimantan, overshadowed the smaller incidents of violence against Chinese Indonesians after May 1998, so much so that Sidel claims anti-Chinese riots to have been replaced by these other forms of violence and political expression.⁴ Yet, in an atmosphere such as that described by Munir, how could Chinese Indonesians escape violence? Incidents of violence against Chinese Indonesians took place in the transitional period after the fall of Suharto in forms that were akin to the 'normal' violence experienced under the New Order. However, there was a difference. Those carrying out the violence now engaged with contemporary discourses and sentiments and in doing so revealed a darker side to the *reformasi*.

For many ordinary Indonesians — farmers, clerks, bus drivers — *reformasi* was synonymous with a struggle against oppression. As the students had demonstrated when they occupied the parliament in May 1998, they were taking back what was rightfully theirs. Graffiti scrawled on shop fronts and homes in towns and cities in Maluku and Java declared their inhabitants and owners to be 'muslim', *pribumi* and 'pro-*reformasi*', revealing some of the categories or labels under which it was perceived to be acceptable by locals for violence to be carried out. Nicholas Herriman's study of the killings of practitioners of 'black magic' in Malang, East Java in 1999 reveals that these acts of 'community justice' were viewed by those who participated in them as part of their version of *reformasi*, or what a local military commander in Tegal called the 'false reform movement'.^{5, 6}

FORCES OF CHANGE

Though many Chinese Indonesians were able to 'reconstruct their everyday roles' in some form during the transitional period,⁷ most remained fearful of the implications of 'flaunting' their 'Chinese-ness' too prominently in a still unpredictable environment. At the same time, some felt empowered and eager to participate in the formation of the emerging political system. In general, however, Chinese Indonesians were acutely aware of the potential for a backlash against their community after the violence in May and, despite continued violence against Chinese in late 1998 and early 1999, continued to believe that assimilation would protect them. Government pleas for Chinese Indonesians to return home to help re-build the economy were mostly met with scepticism. They did not expect nor receive any outpouring of national sympathy. Some Chinese Indonesians responded by seeking alternative ways for healing after the violence.⁸

For many Chinese Indonesians the May 1998 violence enforced a (re)newed awareness of their Chinese ethnicity. The boundaries around their nationality and ethnicity — 'Indonesian-ness' and 'Chinese-ness' — had become less clear because for so long the one had been sacrificed for the other. Pledges of solidarity by overseas Chinese around the world were a part of this, as were the new freedoms available to them in Indonesia. Thus, whilst the way ahead was potentially more open to expressions of their ethnic identity, it was also more confusing as they struggled to reconcile these differences. Some of the influences on Chinese Indonesians at this time have been explored in the previous chapters, in particular the response of the government, national media and some human rights groups. The reactions of ethnic Chinese living in the diaspora and indigenous Indonesians sympathetic to Chinese Indonesians presented further and contrasting responses and challenged them to consider their sense of identity and place in post-Suharto Indonesia.

Overseas Chinese Solidarity

Everybody here agrees that it is extremely important to treat fairly all ethnic minorities who have been victims of violence during the riots. We also appreciate the sympathies that have been expressed. It is important, however, that we have a thorough understanding of the matter. Protests can backfire and cause more problems for Chinese who have been living in Indonesia for generations (Mochtar Riady,

Chinese Indonesian head of Lippo Bank, about protests by overseas Chinese about the rapes).⁹

Reports that over one hundred mostly Chinese-Indonesian women were raped in May 1998 caused international protests, particularly from ethnic Chinese communities across the region. The violence was labelled as 'anti-Chinese' and comparisons were drawn with Nazi persecutions of Jews in Europe and the anti-Communist purge in Indonesia in 1965–66. Martin Lee, leader of the Hong Kong Democratic Party, allegedly wrote in a letter to President Habibie dated 23 July 1998 that 'The severity of these two days of mayhem evoked comparisons to the Nazi regime's attacks against Jews.'¹⁰ Protests were directed towards the Indonesian government and their own governments as well as on the Internet and through the market.¹¹ The rapes of Chinese-Indonesian women evoked an unprecedented response from the governments and citizens of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (with American Chinese) who led the protest.^{12, 13} These reactions were momentous not only in the evolution of a transnational overseas Chinese fraternity (*huaren*) but also for international relations in the region, particularly on human rights policy.

China and Taiwan Respond to the May 1998 Violence

In the 1990s China had aligned itself with ASEAN on issues of foreign policy related to human rights, in particular in opposition to Western intervention on these issues.¹⁴ China's protests to the Indonesian government after violence against Chinese-Indonesian traders in Medan in 1994, during which a Chinese-Indonesian man was killed, had been met with rebukes from the Indonesian government to stay out of the country's domestic affairs. The Chinese government withdrew its statement.¹⁵ However, at a meeting with President Habibie in November 1998, just after the student protests erupted into clashes with security forces outside the Special Session of parliament, China's Premier Jiang Zemin again raised the issue of the problems of the Chinese Indonesians. He was reported as saying, 'We hold that the proper solution of the issue of the Chinese Indonesians will not only serve ... the long term stability of Indonesia, but also ... the smooth development of the relationship of friendly cooperation with neighbouring countries.'¹⁶

The Chinese government's response to the rapes was surprising, not only for its tone but also for the public impetus behind it. At a regional and foreign policy level, China's protest to Indonesia on this

issue constituted a shift from its position on other human rights related issues in this period. Usually, China either aligned with the ASEAN countries or distanced itself entirely. China's initial response, though cautious and careful to note that the victims were 'members of the Indonesian family',¹⁷ was strongly criticised by various groups in China, including a women's group who were among two hundred who demonstrated at the Indonesian Embassy on 17 August 1998.¹⁸ Following this, in late August 1998, the Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan condemned the rapes and called on the Indonesian government to punish the perpetrators and to take measures to protect Chinese Indonesians.¹⁹ At subsequent meetings between Chinese and Indonesian government representatives, the issue of protection of Chinese Indonesians was repeatedly raised.²⁰

Meanwhile Taiwan was even more vocal and active on this issue, demanding that the Indonesian government investigate and try perpetrators and provide protection for victims. The Taiwan government threatened to withdraw its investments in Indonesia, which some estimates put at over US\$13 billion in mid-1998.²¹ It also threatened to block the entry of Indonesian workers into Taiwan — there were over 15,000 Indonesian workers in Taiwan at this time — stating that this threat of sanctions was 'based on the principles of protecting overseas Chinese and protecting human rights'.²² Further, Taiwan pledged that its representative office in Indonesia would help to re-locate abused Chinese-Indonesian women and assist them in filing charges for crimes committed against them. They also offered assistance to victims who wished to travel to Taiwan for medical treatment. During a visit to Surabaya by a delegation of Taiwanese, this offer was extended and accepted by some rape victims from that city.²³

A Taiwan non-governmental delegation which visited Indonesia in early August 1998 met with Defence Minister Gen. Wiranto, who was to report the details of their meeting directly to the Cabinet and President. The delegation also met the Minister for the Status of Women, Tuty Alawiyah, Vice Head of the National Commission for Human Rights, Marzuki Darusman, and the leader of NU, Abdurrahman Wahid. On 9 August 1998 the Minister for Investment, Hamzah Haz, reportedly flew to Taiwan to ask forgiveness for the May violence. The Minister insisted that he also intended to promote Indonesia as an investment destination.²⁴

The rapes galvanised ethnic Chinese across the region. In addition to protests to their own governments, they made great use of the Internet

to disseminate their protest. They evoked images of the Rape of Nanking, eliciting a highly emotional response from many participating on the Internet, or at public demonstrations.²⁵ A Hong Kong political commentator remarked about the rapes: 'This is really hurtful to Chinese people all over the world. Violations such as these are akin to the rape of Nanking.'²⁶ Chinese-Indonesian victims of the violence were named as brothers and sisters and their suffering was embraced. In articles by Elaine Tay and Ien Ang,²⁷ the use of Internet technology for the purpose of creating a global fraternity of Chinese or '*huaren* solidarity' is explored in great depth. As these writers observe, the response from overseas Chinese on the Internet to the rapes issue was quite revolutionary in the way Internet technology was engaged for this type of 'gathering' and activism, with both positive and negative results. The impact of this protest in cyberspace, together with international media coverage and diplomatic pressure was felt keenly by the new Habibie administration in Jakarta. Amid these threats of withdrawal of capital and other sanctions against Indonesia, Habibie announced the establishment of the Joint Team.

At the same time, as Mochtar Riady's comments indicate, many Chinese Indonesians felt uneasy about this response. They were conscious of the potential for a backlash against a protest which itself often descended into racist slurs against Indonesians and Muslims. Moreover, these international protests ignored the suffering of indigenous Indonesians in the violence in May, including the deaths of over one thousand urban poor burned in shopping centres. Representations of the violence against Chinese Indonesians promoted by the overseas Chinese diaspora contributed to what Arthur and Joan Kleinman argue is the 'globalisation of suffering' by way of an instantaneous media that disseminated images simultaneously and yet selectively across the globe. As they put it, these experiences are 'being used as a commodity',²⁸ in this case to galvanise *huaren* solidarity. Meanwhile, denials of the rapes by members of the Indonesian government, military and some religious groups constituted an attempt to erase this suffering altogether.

Not surprisingly, many Chinese Indonesians faced a new dilemma of identity.²⁹ Reactions varied among Chinese Indonesians from different socio-economic backgrounds, levels of assimilation and age groups.³⁰ One older man's opinion about the protests revealed his wariness of being seen as 'too' Chinese. He replied that whilst it was appreciated, in reality this action did not assist their cause. Such protests highlighted his own ethnic 'Chinese-ness' and 'other-ness' at precisely the time when

he needed to feel and to be recognised as Indonesian.³¹ Many Chinese Indonesians responded to bulletins posted on webpages detailing their persecution by similarly condemning and rejecting the strong anti-Indonesian discourse to be found in such forums. They declared that they too were Indonesian and calls to ‘kill Indonesians’ were therefore directed towards them as well. However others, especially those who were born after 1965–66, were excited about exploring their ethnicity after being forced by the government and their parents to deny it all their lives. Their response to the protests and support from Chinese in the region was one of excitement, primarily because they were relieved and felt empowered by the fact that their persecution was being exposed and condemned after such a long period of repression. At the same time there was a sense that it did not matter who was protesting, ethnic Chinese or not, the point was that someone had noticed.³² For others, especially young children of *peranakan* Chinese-Indonesian families who had achieved very high levels of assimilation, the violence forced a hitherto unknown awareness of their ‘Chinese-ness’. A Chinese-Indonesian woman recounted to a friend how confused her children were in May 1998 when she tried to explain to them that they had to leave Jakarta. She told them it was because they were Chinese Indonesians — the children were shocked, asking their mother, ‘Am I Chinese?’

Human Rights and a New Sense of Nationalism

Many Chinese Indonesians found new solidarity with other victims of the Indonesian state. Through victims groups and human rights groups, Chinese-Indonesian victims shared their experiences with indigenous Indonesians and their families who had lost loved ones, property and livelihoods in the violence. The rapes also had a profound impact on human rights discourse and awareness in Indonesia.³³ The national and international response to them was a catalyst for recognition of other ‘victims’ groups and for their experiences of horror to be heard. After the rapes of Chinese-Indonesian women were reported, similar abuses in Aceh, East Timor and West Papua, which had been exposed some time before, were belatedly given public recognition. The formation in July 1998 of the National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan) by President Habibie as a direct consequence of the May violence advanced national consciousness at elite levels about violence against women. The visit at the end of 1998 by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women,

Radhika Coomaraswamy, to Timor, Aceh, Irian and Jakarta, revealed to the world a pattern of state-led violence against women in Indonesia. She concluded that stories told to her by women from across Indonesia had similar characteristics and had been used by 'certain elements in the Indonesian army' in Aceh, Timor and Irian as an 'instrument of torture and intimidation'.³⁴ Whilst she did not emphatically conclude that the rapes of Chinese-Indonesian women had been similarly carried out, she found that as a result of the rapes the 'Chinese community appears to be terrorised' and that security forces had stood by while the rapes took place. The violence against Chinese Indonesians and particularly the rapes triggered not only an vigorous discourse about the rights of ethnic Chinese among some Chinese-Indonesian groups and, as Aguilar calls them, 'newly aware *pribumi*',³⁵ but also a wider dialogue about inter-ethnic relations as a whole in Indonesia.

Drawing together different victims of state violence and human rights abuses was a process carried out most effectively at the grassroots level within human rights groups and womens' groups in Indonesia. Volunteers for Humanity (TRuK) was such a group that explicitly sought to unite victims regardless of ethnicity, class, religion or the type of suffering. It formed victims' groups for those who had lost property or loved ones and were traumatised by the May violence. Members of these groups included Chinese Indonesians and relatives of *pribumi* Indonesians who had lost family in the fires at the shopping malls and families of students killed at Trisakti. Groups including TRuK, KontraS (Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence) and women's groups, Kalyanamitra and Mitra Perempuan became the locations for a unique experience of solidarity between ethnic Chinese and their fellow Indonesians. The point of contact was their common suffering and persecution.³⁶

This sense of solidarity was also felt throughout the wider Chinese-Indonesian community as it saw indigenous Indonesians embrace the suffering of Chinese-Indonesian victims and offer them assistance. In consequence, there was a new sense of fraternity with indigenous Indonesian human rights workers and others who expressed sympathy for their persecution and suffering. Some Chinese Indonesians also joined these non-governmental organisations as volunteers after the violence, and others gave considerable donations. Contributing to this were events after the violence involving death threats against human rights defenders, together with victims and witnesses of the violence. The murder of a woman in Jakarta in October 1998, Marthadinata, who was a volunteer

with TRuK and a suspected victim of violence herself, was a critical moment. This prolonged terrorism of indigenous human rights workers and their families and Chinese-Indonesian victims created an even stronger bond between these groups and, ironically, restored much of their faith in Indonesian nationalism.³⁷

A Political Role for Chinese Indonesians?

The May violence empowered the Chinese-Indonesian community as a persecuted minority under the New Order to follow the path of the *reformasi* movement towards greater equality in a new and democratic Indonesia. For some Chinese Indonesians this meant taking a leap into the political arena that they had deliberately avoided for many years after the trauma associated with the proscription of Baperki in the mid-1960s. A few Chinese-Indonesian political parties were among the dozens registered before the 1999 general election, following the revoking of New Order laws banning other than officially sanctioned political parties.³⁸ For other Chinese Indonesians the path to greater equality and participation was through promotion of anti-discrimination and tolerance. This sense of empowerment led to much discussion and reflection among ethnic Chinese about their place in Indonesia, including debate on questions of assimilation and integration, the relationship between Chinese-Indonesian business and ethnic Chinese identity. At a discursive level there was considerable discussion around the use of terms like *Cina* and *Tionghoa* — the former considered by many older Chinese Indonesians to be a crass and somewhat derogatory term compared with the latter³⁹ — and ‘*pri*’ (*pribumi*) and ‘*non pri*’.⁴⁰

The range of responses, writings and seminars that took place after May 1998 indicates the ongoing complexity of identity for Chinese Indonesians.⁴¹ Although the tension between their ethnicity and their nationalism has always been present, it increased after May 1998. During the New Order, their ‘different’ status was laid down in unchallengeable legislation and political and social practices. With the end of the New Order regime, and particularly given the severity of the violence and rapes, there were great expectations that Chinese Indonesians could gain equality under the law. Some even hoped they would at last be granted their place as a *suku bangsa* (ethnic group) within the Indonesian nation. In this context it is telling that although a large number of Chinese Indonesians chose to flee Indonesia after the May 1998 violence and during the June 1999 elections, the vast majority chose to stay and most

of those who did leave soon returned. Though no actual figures for departures of Chinese Indonesians were compiled, official statistics show that during the period 14–20 May 1998, a total of 70,837 Indonesians departed Indonesia with 27,616 then returning over the period 23–26 May. During the whole of May 1998, 121,345 people arrived in Singapore from Indonesia, almost double the number of arrivals for April.⁴² Chinese-Indonesian communities in Jakarta and Solo reported that most ethnic Chinese who fled during this period returned or resettled elsewhere in Indonesia.⁴³ When asked why they did not leave (providing of course that they had the means), many Chinese Indonesians would reply, 'Where would I go? This is my home.'

LINGERING FEARS FOR SECURITY

Our blood will never mix with Chinese blood... . Actually we hate the Chinese, but we couldn't do anything about them before, because they were protected by Suharto. But I don't think they will be protected anymore (Sutanjo, a 38-year-old resident of Gresik, East Java).⁴⁴

To restore belief to people whose homes were destroyed by fire, is not a simple case of replacing the damaged houses.... These wounds cannot be treated even with a stream of funds gushing from the government, the reason being, as Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono has said, what has disappeared is a trust that has a value far more expensive, far greater than even trillions of rupiah (Christianto Wibisono).⁴⁵

It is not only the country's 'non-indigenous' people who aren't feeling safe, even 'indigenous' people are feeling insecure nowadays (Rosita Noer, Bakom PKB spokesperson).⁴⁶

In the aftermath of May 1998, in addition to the push of their Chinese 'family' in the region and the pull of the growing solidarity they began to feel with many *pribumi* Indonesians, Chinese Indonesians were also forced to confront the reality that the national political, social and economic situation remained largely unchanged. Despite reforms introduced by President Habibie's government to provide more personal and political freedoms, this process remained limited for Chinese Indonesians. Although the *reformasi* spirit provided greater space to consider questions related to their identity, the situation was regarded by many Chinese Indonesians as actually more uncertain and potentially

threatening than before.⁴⁷ From elite millionaire businessmen to victims of the recent violence, Chinese Indonesians knew from experience of the need to be wary of political and social change in Indonesia. With the disposition for anti-Chinese violence still present in every community where ethnic Chinese lived and worked, their security remained of prime importance.

Across the country not only ethnic Chinese but Indonesians generally, were grappling with the consequences of the events of May 1998. Now that the dictator and oppressor was gone, who and what system would replace him? In this fragile and even perilous state, many groups emerged to fill the leadership void, some democratic and others based on criminality and retribution.⁴⁸ This was an increasingly confusing environment for Chinese Indonesians used to seeking protection from figures in the military and government and with a highly cautious attitude towards direct involvement in politics.⁴⁹ Under Suharto theirs had been a position of persecution and exploitation. Nevertheless certain behaviours and relationships were prescribed to ensure that they could continue to live and work in Indonesia. Now many were less sure of their place in Indonesian society.⁵⁰ What would become of the *cukong* relationships between the powerful conglomerates and the even more powerful figures in the military and government, or of arrangements between small shop-owners and local security officials under a new political leadership? Who would protect them now?⁵¹

The realisation that they had been let down in May 1998 by the customary formal and informal arrangements to ensure their security was actually more shocking for many Chinese Indonesians than the material losses they had suffered. Whilst some chose to maintain relations with the security forces and government, others erected higher fences around the complexes and streets where they lived.⁵² Many lost confidence that assistance would be forthcoming from the authorities and increasingly took their safety into their own hands. Nurdin Purnomo, leader of the newly formed Unity in Diversity Party (*Partai Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*), explained: 'Now we are told to fight for and protect ourselves. So, the fences rise. If something happens of which we are increasingly afraid, yes, the fences will get higher still.'⁵³ As a further precaution some ethnic Chinese sent their children to school and university outside Indonesia.⁵⁴

The new government and the markets were quick to acknowledge that security was crucial to the decisions Chinese Indonesians would make about their future in Indonesia. Subsequent efforts to 'bring them home' highlighted this as a necessity, yet there was equally as much that

showed ethnic Chinese that their situation in Indonesia was as perilous as ever.

Economic Stresses Continue

These hungry and disappointed people could easily turn to looters (Sumitro from the Department for Social and Political Affairs, Pontianak).⁵⁵

A great number of unemployed people, a worsening economic crisis, a euphoria over democracy, bureaucratic ills ... combined with ... a shortage in the food supply which will lead to starvation and physical diseases (have) added to the people's confusion and misery.... It's almost natural for people under such pressures to become violent and impulsive (Syafii Maarif, Chairman of Muhammadiyah).⁵⁶

Despite Suharto's resignation, the Indonesian economy sank further into depression with the collapse of demand and suspension of much Chinese-Indonesian business activity.⁵⁷ The most acute problem was the impact of the failing economy on the purchasing power of ordinary Indonesians.⁵⁸ According to BPS figures, in 1998 about 24 per cent of Indonesians were living below the poverty line. As the devaluation of the rupiah fed through to domestic inflation, the purchasing power of a worker earning the minimum daily wage of Rp5,800 in April 1997 had already fallen 35 per cent from 5.7 kilograms of rice to 3.7 kilograms in April 1998.⁵⁹ The rupiah continued to fluctuate wildly, from Rp9,500 to the dollar when Habibie took office to Rp13,000 in late July before recovering to Rp7,000–8,000 in October.⁶⁰ The pressure on the urban and rural poor who were wage dependent and on farmers did not ease and underpinned rising frustration. Across the country but particularly in Java, warehouses and distribution centres (many of them owned by Chinese Indonesians) were looted. Lands people claimed to have been stolen from them during the New Order were re-occupied. At the end of 1998, the National Police reported that crime had increased by ten per cent in Indonesia.⁶¹ In September in Labuan, West Java the head of the local branch of the Indonesian Islamic teachers and clerics Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, MUI) explained that the people had simply reached a state of exasperation: 'Because they are annoyed For a long time the residents have complained of many problems, but they have not been heeded.'⁶²

By mid-1998 the economy was at a virtual standstill. During the first quarter of 1998, capital outflows from Indonesia accelerated,

reaching an estimated Rp70 trillion.⁶³ There was no way of assessing the ethnicity of this capital but the authors of the report argued that, although IMF loans were necessary for rebuilding the economy, Chinese-Indonesian capital was crucial to bringing it 'back on track'. In March 1999 this view was supported by the World Bank Vice President for Asia Pacific, Jean-Michael Severino: 'The Chinese are the issue in Indonesia ... How they fix it (the Chinese problem) is up to the Indonesians, but the economic impact if they do not fix it will be huge.' He warned, 'If there is no agreement between the two communities then probably the Chinese won't be part of the development process.'⁶⁴ Another report stated, 'The most significant damage from last month's riots is not the 217 million dollars worth of property damage, but the shattered confidence of the ethnic Indonesian Chinese who fled Jakarta with their capital.'⁶⁵

The Economic Imperative to Bring Chinese Indonesians 'Back Home'

The priority now is to convince the Chinese that they are Indonesians and they should be coming back to doing their usual businesses (Tanri Abeng, Minister for State Enterprises).⁶⁶

But justice must be seen to be done. I am sceptical about these statements (by President Habibie and the Coordinating Minister for Economics, Finance and Industry, Ginandjar Kartasmita). Things are easily said. I have changed my Chinese name as encouraged by the government.... I am alienated from the indigenous people in many ways. The number on my identity card is discriminately coded to tell government officials and policemen that I am not indigenous. This is reminiscent of Hitler's way of identifying the Jews (Liem Sian Tie, 5th generation Chinese Indonesian, manager of a Glodok hotel which was destroyed in May 1998).⁶⁷

One of the first tasks of President Habibie's government was to persuade ethnic Chinese who had fled Indonesia or who had ceased their economic activities to return home and re-open their businesses. There are no exact figures but it is estimated that around 20–30,000 Chinese Indonesians left Indonesia in mid-May 1998, with many more seeking safety elsewhere in Indonesia, particularly in Bali.⁶⁸ Habibie set out with a team of special envoys on a confidence-building campaign across the region. James Riady, the son of Mochtar Riady was appointed the Special Envoy to China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand. He commented that their task was not an easy one: 'Many of them [Chinese

Indonesians] are frightened, threatened and their sense of confidence has been greatly affected.'⁶⁹ In interviews with newspapers from the United States to Singapore, Habibie urged Chinese Indonesians to return and attempted to reassure them of their place in Indonesia. He visited Glodok, the heart of Jakarta's old 'Chinatown' and posed for photographs with Chinese Indonesians in front of their burnt-out stores and hotels. 'I came to meet you and to express my sincere sympathy' he told them.⁷⁰ Other members of government also sought to reassure Chinese Indonesians. The Coordinating Minister for the Economy, Finance and Industry Ginandjar Kartasasmita vowed to protect them: 'what they need is assurance that they will be guaranteed safety, security and that they will be treated as Indonesians, and that we can guarantee'.⁷¹ The Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare, Haryono Suyono, backed up this promise in late July when he also pledged that the military were committed to the safety of Chinese Indonesians.⁷² Abdurrahman Wahid, Amien Rais and other political leaders expressed their support, with Wahid especially making numerous gestures. The leader of NU became a founding member of the Anti-Discrimination Movement (*Gerakan Anti Diskriminasi*, GANDI) and issued a joint statement with the founder of the Astra Group, William Soeryadjaya, urging Chinese Indonesians to return and assist with Indonesia's reconstruction.⁷³ Wahid also continued publicly to support the recognition of Confucianism as a religion in Indonesia.⁷⁴

However this message, particularly from President Habibie himself, was inconsistent and for many unconvincing, particularly given his previous support for an economic policy of affirmative action for indigenous business. As recently as March 1998 during a Vice-Presidential visit to Japan at the peak of anti-Chinese sentiment and violence across Java, he had commented: 'It is absurd that the Chinese, who make up three per cent of the population are controlling ninety per cent of the economy. I would like to give opportunities to the *pribumi*, who make up the majority of the population, and build them up.'⁷⁵ Further, in an interview with the *Washington Post* published in 19 July 1998, Habibie — now President — stated: 'If the Chinese community does not come back because they don't trust their own country and society, I cannot force, nobody can force them.... But do they really think we will then die? Their place will be taken by others.'⁷⁶ Prominent Chinese Indonesians, foreign investors and currency markets widely condemned his remarks and quickly forced Habibie to back-pedal. After release of the article the rupiah was reported to have fallen by up to seven per cent.⁷⁷

Just days later Habibie invited the leaders of ten of Indonesia's largest Chinese-Indonesian controlled business groups to the Bina Graha presidential office and assured them of their safety. The leader of the Ciputra Group reported that the President 'also reassured us there will be no more differences between *pribumi* and non-*pribumi* and this will be entered into law', whilst the businessmen had conveyed 'the need for security to be guaranteed so that we can resume full operations and re-open job opportunities'.⁷⁸ Habibie went on to tell the *Asian Wall Street Journal* in early August that he was an ally of Chinese Indonesians, 'I have full sympathy for them ... not only full sympathy, I'm on their side, proactive.... They should trust me.' Nevertheless, Habibie continued to stress that there was a limit to what he could do and say to coax Chinese Indonesians back, 'I cannot go and take my airplane and beg them and kiss them at the feet....'⁷⁹ Further, in response to a question in an interview with *Business Week* asking if he could give assurance that riots would not happen again, he gave some indication of the limitations of his leadership (whether self prescribed or not), 'You know, I'm not God. I'm doing what's systematically within my capacity as President; making laws and taking a different approach. Give me time. Give the people time.'⁸⁰ His position was supported by the Minister for State Enterprises, Tanri Abeng, who commented about the *Washington Post* interview: 'As a politician he had to make that statement. If the Chinese do not want to return, what else can we do but turn to existing resources. We cannot depend solely on any one group.'⁸¹ At the same time the minister also played down the claims of systematic rapes of Chinese-Indonesian women commenting, 'I would say the whole thing has been exaggerated. There may be a few cases but certainly not on a large scale.'⁸²

Sofyan Wanandi described the Habibie government's attitude towards Chinese Indonesians at this time as 'defensive' and far too slow and unconvincing in its efforts to heal the wounds in that community.⁸³ For many the ambivalence of Habibie's position reflected the insincerity of his message. It became apparent to some that rather than intending to make amends with ethnic Chinese as fellow Indonesians, the President's urgings were motivated by what another special envoy, Imam Taufik, described as 'badly needed' capital and economic activity: 'The key is to convince Chinese businessmen that law and order will come back. Political instability does not scare them. They know how to deal with it. They want safety.'⁸⁴ Taufik made it clear that it was businessmen above all whom they were trying to coax back. Further, the government was emphatic about its inability to provide financial assistance to Chinese

Indonesians who had suffered losses, stating that ethnic Chinese would simply make do, as they always had. Ginanjar Kartasasmita commented: 'Usually the Chinese can overcome their problems by themselves. They have their own network ... we encourage them to reopen their business again. We are going to make it easy for them to renew the permit. And of course they can access the banking system.'⁸⁵ The call to 'repair the economy' was not exclusive to government ministers. Others including NU leader Wahid also followed this line, 'So will you please return, because we need you to revive our economy', he implored.⁸⁶

The apparent sympathies of elite politicians and government officials for Chinese-Indonesian victims of persecution seemed superficial when followed by a call to resume their business as usual, as though nothing had happened. Marzuki Darusman observed: 'But there's a mixed feeling, a mixed picture, where on the one side you have sympathy because of the raping, but this ambivalent view of the Chinese coming back and continuing again where they left off a few months ago.'⁸⁷ Moreover, some Chinese Indonesians believed that their decision to stay away or to keep their business closed was similarly interpreted by non-Chinese as anti-nationalist:

It is still fresh in their memory. After the May '98 tragedy Chinese shop owners chose to close their businesses for a period, rather than become another victim. But this sensible behaviour is often explained by figures in the government as being unloyal, unnationalist, these things are often used to incite hatred further towards the Chinese community as a whole.⁸⁸

Others saw calls by Habibie, Wahid and Amien Rais for Chinese Indonesians to return 'home' to help rebuild the national economy not as an affirmation of their identity as Indonesians but as an action which perpetuated the myth of ethnic Chinese economic domination. Early on, at the beginning of July 1998, the prominent Chinese-Indonesian economist Kwik Kian Gie attempted to encourage the nation to think with a 'cool head' about news in the media concerning the collapse of distribution networks after the 'exodus' of Chinese Indonesians. He questioned how it was possible that the departure of an estimated 100,000 people, most of whom returned days later, could explain the great increase in prices for basic goods. He thought the decreased value of the rupiah was largely to blame.⁸⁹ Adhie M. Massardi wrote in *Kompas*: 'Calls like these (to return home [*inserted by translator*]) give the impression that government and influential national figures —

Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid), Amien Rais, also President Habibie — consider that those who move out of the country actually have control of the life (economy) of the nation. In turn this attitude gives justification for the social jealousy that arose from the political engineering carried out by the shameful New Order regime.⁹⁰ The call to return was focused on Chinese Indonesians who had fled with their capital from Indonesia. What of those Chinese Indonesians who remained behind in Indonesia?

From its first weeks in office, Habibie's government had pledged to reform discriminatory laws and to support equality for all Indonesians including ethnic Chinese. In early 1999, after ten months in office, President Habibie was forced to admit that Chinese-Indonesian business remained critical to Indonesia's economic recovery because only after ethnic Chinese began to return would foreign investment have the confidence to follow.⁹¹ Yet the President was still unable to give any guarantee to Chinese Indonesians.

(T)he Chinese are afraid that there is an Islamic wave which is going to hurt them. I wish we could change that like turning off a light. But it's not that easy. If you are religious you will never stress differences among people. The Chinese, I love them as I love others. I only hate criminals.⁹²

For most Chinese Indonesians this vow was cold comfort. Indeed, in his interview with *Business Week*, Habibie had spoken of taking 'different approaches' and 'changing laws' that would improve the conditions for ethnic Chinese in Indonesian society so long as they trusted him and gave him more time.⁹³ The reality was, as Sofyan Wanandi described it, that the Habibie government's attitude on these issues was 'defensive' and that there was little will to affect any real improvement in conditions for Chinese Indonesians.⁹⁴ The various gestures and as discussed below, small legal amendments, made during the Habibie government's term had very little effect.

Taking a Different Approach?

These statements about the repeal (of laws or regulations) or investigation of cases smelling of discrimination, in actual fact are only for political consumption, only to increase his (Habibie's) political credit points (Hendardi, Director, Indonesian Legal Aid Group [PBHI]).⁹⁵

Expelling the Chinese might work, but I don't know ... My

neighbour is Chinese and she is very kind and gets along with us well. So I wouldn't want her sent away ... Maybe we should just put restrictions on the Chinese so that they do not dominate the economy (Ramsiana Kasuma, 20-year-old university student).⁹⁶

From early in his presidency Habibie made symbolic reforms to the rights of the Chinese-Indonesian community that were limited and lacked power. In early June 1998 the Jakarta City administration pledged that 'in the future' it would end discriminatory practices in processing identity cards for Chinese Indonesians. In fact, Regional Rule (No.1) about Population Registration had abolished the use of these procedures two years earlier.⁹⁷ At around the same time, the Minister for State Owned Enterprise, Tanri Abeng, floated the idea of a Bill of Rights, claiming that it had the support of the President and was in the process of being investigated by the Minister for Justice. He told delegates at a conference in Singapore that the proposed Bill was intended to 'eliminate the perceived and actual differences' between groups in Indonesia.⁹⁸ On 16 September 1998 he issued a Presidential Instruction (Inpres No. 26 1998) that the terms '*pri*' and '*non pri*' should no longer be used in official government policy and business. The Instruction also stipulated that equal opportunity be granted to all Indonesians of whatever ethnic group, religion or race.⁹⁹ Months later on 5 May 1999 a further Presidential Instruction (Inpres No. 4 1999)¹⁰⁰ restated Presidential Instruction No. 56 1996, which was issued on 9 July 1996, stipulating that the Indonesian Citizenship Certificate (*Surat Bukti Kewarganegaraan Republik Indonesia*, SBKRI) would no longer be necessary and that the identity card (*Kartu Tanda Penduduk*, KTP) was sufficient proof of citizenship. Almost hidden in its last clause was an instruction abolishing the ban on the study of Mandarin language.

Some months later *Sinergi* magazine noted the ineffectuality of this decree. Its reporters discovered that the SBKRI was still being demanded by authorities and that Chinese Indonesians were still being forced to pay extra for the processing of immigration documents, passports and so on.¹⁰¹ They concluded that the changes in the law were not being communicated to the members of the bureaucracy who administered them. The most significant development was President Habibie's decision in July 1998 to establish the Joint Team to investigate the May violence. Yet, as discussed earlier, its significance was negated when his government effectively dismissed its findings. Indeed, in March 1999 Habibie pleaded ignorance about the May violence:

I don't have a full picture of what happened. I am not sure we will have it before the election. What we have seen in May is not the face of Indonesia. We are still ascertaining what happened, who engineered it. We know it was engineered. That is all we know.¹⁰²

The Director of the Indonesian Legal Aid Group (*Persatuan Bantuan Hukum Indonesia*, PBHI), Hendaridi, believed that these laws were introduced merely to score political points, though he believed Habibie had failed in this. '(Habibie) believed that the way to handle discrimination problems is for example, by dealing with the May incident in a complete way. And this also was not demonstrated.'¹⁰³ As further indication of the lack of political will and the weakness of Habibie's presidency, despite promises he made as early as August–September 1998, the government did not ratify the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination until 25 May 1999.¹⁰⁴ These empty legal gestures caused many Chinese Indonesians to question Habibie's stated commitment to protecting them and their interests as Indonesians and with good reason to ask, 'Is such a Presidential promise adequate?'¹⁰⁵

A notable inconsistency in President Habibie's 'bring them home' project, was the rise and rise of Adi Sasono from leader of the prominent Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia*, ICMI) to Minister for Cooperatives. Sasono's critics maintained that as a proponent of people's economy (*ekonomi rakyat*), he wanted the government to transfer economic resources from mainly Chinese-Indonesian companies to cooperatives owned by mainly *pribumi* businessmen.¹⁰⁶ Yet Sasono argued, along the lines of the justification for PP10 in 1959, that his design for a people's economy with emphasis on cooperatives was inclusive: 'every Indonesian citizen has the same status before the law and, because of this, Chinese-Indonesian citizens also have the right to establish and manage a cooperative'. Nonetheless, hinting that he was still suspicious of Chinese-Indonesian business methods, 'I only warn that they should not become a cooperative that is exclusive and has members who are only Chinese. One of the principles of the cooperative is that membership is voluntary and the cooperative must be open in character....'¹⁰⁷ Sasono constantly denied that he was 'anti-Chinese', whilst also making comments like, 'One of the reasons for the May riot is the sharpening social gap between rich and poor. Those who are poor became angry and were easily incited and for a few moments burned cars and shops.'¹⁰⁸ The sub-text was that those whose businesses were attacked were indeed 'rich'.

Some critics of the policy went so far as to claim that Sasono's project was causing Chinese Indonesians who had until then not taken their capital out of Indonesia to begin to do so:

In short, Adi Sasono was one of the main reasons for capital flight outside of the country by Chinese businessmen ... Ironically after the capital flight because of fear of an increase in aggression towards Chinese business here, people like Adi Sasono took advantage of this phenomenon again by attacking them again with accusations that they were un-nationalist because they were responsible for capital flight.¹⁰⁹

He was dubbed by the international media as 'Indonesia's most dangerous man',¹¹⁰ due to the alarm caused within markets when in January 1999, Habibie's budget included US\$2.67 billion to fund credit programmes for cooperatives.¹¹¹

Sasono's crusade to redistribute wealth concentrated in the hands of a few to smaller companies or 'poorer' businesses was described by his supporters in terms of a modern day 'Robin Hood' and was reminiscent of the programme supported by the Assaat movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Sasono himself explained it as an anti-monopoly and anti-cronyism policy. However, in a society where wealth continued to be equated with ethnicity, and 'Chinese-ness' in particular, this policy was easily interpreted as anti-Chinese.

Still Scapegoats?

What has followed the fall of Suharto is, for the most part, not 'Disorder' but Democracy, with 'anti-Chinese riots' now replaced by new forms of political conflict, participation and expression.¹¹²

I don't see that Habibie has done anything significant to indicate he's working towards racial healing The feeling against the Chinese still runs deep (Rika Agustina, 39-year-old Chinese, October 1998).¹¹³

As the Habibie government waxed and waned in its policies towards Chinese Indonesians — conscious of the economic imperative to bring them home but aware that they could not be seen to kowtow to the Chinese Indonesians' demands — the Indonesian public was preoccupied with the rising prices of food and other basic needs. Nationally there were clear indications that sentiments and prejudices about ethnic Chinese

in Indonesia had changed little since the May violence. The debate that emerged around the Joint Team over the rapes during the mid-May violence is the strongest evidence of this. Rather than providing a space for sympathy and solidarity with the victims of the violence and the Chinese-Indonesian community, the attention given by the media — and by extension the public — to the rapes and its preoccupation with ‘proof’ created a context for greater hostility towards these groups in wider society. This was exacerbated by comments made by the President and members of his cabinet and by their rejection of the report assembled by the Joint Team. Although it was clearly in the interests of the nation for Chinese Indonesians to regain confidence in its institutions, the government failed to deliver. Not only Chinese Indonesians but also the wider population acknowledged the insincerity of the government’s expression of sympathy to ethnic Chinese. The people did not see a President preaching peace, reconciliation and equality.

The downfall of the Suharto regime did not remove the widespread belief of many Indonesians that Chinese Indonesians controlled the economy and that they were irredeemably corrupt. Nor was this belief without foundation. In towns and cities across Indonesia, most traders and businessmen were still ethnic Chinese. In many cases they used — or found it necessary to resort to — corrupt practices to protect their businesses or to further their success. The rent-seekers in the government bureaucracy who set the rules had not been affected by government reforms. The pre-conditions for anti-Chinese sentiment to become anti-Chinese violence that existed before Suharto’s fall therefore remained in place afterwards. Chinese Indonesians would learn that *reformasi* did not mean equal rights or an end to anti-Chinese violence.¹¹⁴

VIOLENCE AND *REFORMASI*

The majority of Javanese have been brainwashed by wayang stories where violence is a constant (Pramoedya Ananta Toer).¹¹⁵

Rumours, there are so many rumours.... But when you’re Chinese, you stay alert to rumours. At the first sign of trouble I close my shop and go home and lock the door (Bun Kok, 48-year-old Chinese-Indonesian medicine trader).¹¹⁶

In the lead up to Independence Day on 17 August 1998, it was reported that fears among the Chinese-Indonesian community were rising again. It was estimated that up to 250,000 people had fled to Bali in the

previous two months, which caused an increase in the price of land and property in the province.¹¹⁷ The reason for this alarm included continuing economic hardship and incidents such as the robbery of Chinese-Indonesian graves in Pekalongan in early August. In Semarang, Chinese-Indonesian residents reported that strange graffiti had appeared on their homes and shops. The graffiti included a triangle which, it was later said, represented a command to loot; elsewhere a circle appeared, allegedly denoting that women inside should be raped. Some Chinese Indonesians also received telephone calls demanding up to Rp1 million to protect their families. In response, the local police and army initiated patrols in certain areas. District Commander Maj. Gen. Tyasno Sudarto guaranteed the protection of residents but urged them to be more alert: 'If there is a plan for a riot, we must oppose it. Because we do not want a repeat of the Solo riot in Semarang.'¹¹⁸ Chinese Indonesians also fled from Surabaya, many to Bali, after some attacks on warehouses and shops and receiving threatening phone calls.¹¹⁹

From August 1998 to early 1999 economic hardship and social disenfranchisement formed the basis for violence against Chinese Indonesians. The cases of Cilacap, Bagansiapi-api, Kebumen, and Holis, Bandung are presented here because they not only saw the greatest damage in this period but also influenced subsequent violence and anti-Chinese sentiment.

Cilacap, 28 August 1998

On Friday 28 August 1998 a celebration was planned in Cilacap, a harbour town on the south coast of Central Java, to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Indonesian Fishers' Association (*Himpunan Nelayan se-Indonesia*, HNSI). That morning the organisation's national chairman Tuk Setyohardi and other dignitaries were due to speak to HNSI members from across the district. Shortly before the programme commenced, thousands of fishermen — reported numbers range up to 6,000 and even 10,000 — gathered at the entrance to the fishery harbour. They then proceeded to set fire to ten motorised fishing trawlers and to destroy a number of vehicles as well as the offices of the port authority. The trawlers were owned by Chinese Indonesians originally from the Sumatran fishing centre of Bagansiapi-api in Riau province, but still known as 'newcomers' (*pendatang*), even though most of them had lived and worked in Cilacap for over two decades. The following day, homes and shops owned by Chinese Indonesians in Cilacap, particularly

those selling basic goods and fishing supplies, were attacked and looted. Twenty-seven buildings were attacked. Although it was clear that fishermen were responsible for the violence at the harbour, police insisted that those who carried out the subsequent violence in the town of Cilacap itself were ‘infiltrators’ who had sought to take advantage of the earlier violence. Fishermen’s groups refused to accept responsibility for looting the shops and called on police to deal firmly with the culprits.¹²⁰

Toke, Trawlers and Tradition

Look at my home, my friends’ houses, we have worked for 15 years and we can’t even afford to buy a TV set.... I had been planning to buy one in July, but I found out that the money I had been saving was not enough because the price had increased by two hundred per cent (Sarwono, Cilacap fisherman).¹²¹

The arrival of trawlers from Bagansiapi-api in the early 1970s had had a great impact on its local fishing industry. Until this time, Cilacap fishermen had maintained their ‘traditional’ or small-scale methods of fishing using boats with sails or oars and simple fishing gear, resulting in small but sufficient catches from a seemingly plentiful and unending supply of fish from the South Java Sea.¹²² However, these methods were quickly undermined by the capacity of the tiger trawlers (*pukat harimau*) to bring in tonnes of fish daily. As the numbers of trawlers operating out of Cilacap increased, so did the demand for crews. Many ‘traditional’ fishermen abandoned their own boats and an increasingly unsure daily remuneration to work on the trawlers for a steady wage and, if they were fortunate enough, a portion of the takings from the daily haul. It was these crews (*anak buah kapal*, ABK) and those still operating as ‘traditional’ fishermen who stormed the harbour on 28 August 1998. Their grievances were expressed at the time in terms of dissatisfaction with low wages, poor working conditions and provisions for compensation for death or injury at sea, as well as frustration with the corrupt processes of both the port authority and their Chinese-Indonesian bosses (*toke*).

Prior to the violence, crews members on board the Cilacap trawlers had earned Rp2,000 per day and were promised two per cent of the day’s haul if it exceeded Rp1 million in total value. Cilacap’s Police Commander later described these wages and conditions as the lowest in the country: ‘Can it be imagined that they can pay people a wage of Rp2,000 a day without thinking of the consequences, when the fact is that there is nowhere in Indonesia that gives a wage of less than Rp3,000.’¹²³ In

addition to the poor wages, corrupt port authorities in collusion with the *toke* often understated the size of the daily haul to avoid paying the fishermen their share. As the fishermen were prohibited to enter the weighing area, they were powerless to prove their suspicions. With prices for basic goods increasing, the crew complained of being unable to feed their families or to send their children to school. One remarked, 'We can't even buy a kilogram of rice for two nights' work.' Meanwhile, they observed their bosses pulling in tonnes of fish daily and selling it to overseas buyers willing to pay higher and higher prices as the value of the rupiah continued to slide. Buyers in Europe, Singapore, Taiwan, PRC and elsewhere were paying up to three hundred per cent more for fish and seafood. Siswadi, a member of one of the crews complained, 'The *toke* exploited us like we were slaves.'¹²⁴ On what was to have been a day of celebration of their profession and industry, the crews attacked those they perceived to be the agents of their poverty, the *toke* and the port authority. Siswadi did not trace the chain of responsibility to the economic forces responsible for the two hundred per cent rise in the price of basic goods. His reality was tied to the size of his daily wage.

After the attack, the crews claimed that their repeated protests to the port authority and to the *toke* about these conditions had been ignored. Comments made by some *toke* support these claims. One trawler-owner, Atay, insisted that he was unaware of any problems his crews were having in making ends meet, 'The Rp2,000 wage is something that we agreed upon together. They continued to show up to work to go out to sea. Wasn't that proof that the wage was not a problem for them?'¹²⁵ This unresolved dispute between the *toke* and their crews escalated in the months before the violence on 28 August. In addition to the rising prices of basic goods, two days before the violence rumours had circulated around the port that fifty new trawlers were on their way to Cilacap from Bagansiapi-api. The number of permits already issued for trawlers to operate from Cilacap was cited as approximately three hundred, but fishermen's groups believed the actual number in operation was around five hundred boats. It was well known amongst crews and 'traditional fishermen' that *toke* bribed the authorities to allow them to operate without permits, as a result of which the number had steadily increased.

Jumat Kliwon and Harbour Gateways

Whenever Friday [*Jumat*] coincides with the Javanese day, *Kliwon*, it is prohibited for Cilacap fishermen to fish, but for Bagan

[siapi-api] fishermen, there was no such prohibition. So we were angry and eventually this incident occurred (an anonymous Cilacap fisherman).¹²⁶

The complaints voiced by trawler crews and ‘traditional’ fishermen did not end with accusations of corruption and unfair wages and conditions. Theirs was also a grievance articulated in cultural and religious terms, which further problematised their relations with their Chinese-Indonesian and mostly Christian bosses. It was therefore perhaps no coincidence that the violence in Cilacap erupted on a Friday. Local fishermen had long complained that the *toke* forced them to go to sea on *Jumat Kliwon*, a day of rest and prayer traditionally observed by local fishermen.¹²⁷ *Jumat Kliwon*, is the day when *Kliwon*, the fifth day of the Javanese calendar, falls on a Friday (*Jumat*) (once every 35 days) in the Javanese calendar month of Sura. It is regarded by the fishermen of Cilacap as a day for making ritual offerings to Nyai Roro Kidul, who is according to myth, the Queen of the South Seas. The custom of not going to sea on this day dates back to the nineteenth century after a decision made at that time by the local nobility and leaders of the fishing community.¹²⁸ As the Vice-Secretary General of Indonesian Fishers’ Association, Djimanto, further explains,

In Cilacap, there is a firm belief that every *Jumat Kliwon* fishermen are forbidden from going to sea. This promise is a type of custom that is also obeyed by fishermen and business people who are outsiders so that no misunderstanding occurs which could cause hostility.¹²⁹

The ‘traditional’ fishermen of Cilacap were dealt yet another blow with the construction of a new harbour, which was opened by President Suharto in 1996. Local fishermen attest that at that time they alerted the port authorities to the fact that the gateway to the new port from the open sea would be too narrow for their boats to pass through easily. Their concerns were not addressed and, as they had warned would be the case, the traditional fishing boats were forced to scrape through the gateway, often becoming damaged in the process.¹³⁰ The fishermen of Cilacap felt that they were under siege.

The day after the violence, trawler crews refused to resume work until an agreement for better wages and conditions was reached, ‘No boats have yet set sail for sea. We are still waiting for the fishing port’s agreement with the *toke*, whether to raise our salaries or not’, explained one crew member. Shortly thereafter the fishermen were successful in

gaining an increase in wages from Rp2,000 to Rp5,000 per day and an increase in the compensation payment for death at sea from Rp750,000 to Rp1 million.¹³¹ It was also reported that after a public meeting to discuss the various issues raised by the fishermen, the harbour gateway would at last be widened.¹³²

Race, Class and Justice

The problem is justice, the problem was that the aspirations of the little people were not heard for years (Head of Indonesian Fishers' Association).¹³³

Look at those newcomers from Bagan, they work for only two days and they have gotten rich. They have big capital, they pay us only Rp2,000 per day, never gave us a raise for the past six years and make profits hundreds of times over (Siswadi, 22-year-old crew member).¹³⁴

The growing economic and social disparity between the *toke* and their workers provided the immediate context for the violence on 28 August 1998 — a vertical or class conflict between employers and employees. However, the perception of the *toke* not only as exploitative and corrupt employers but also as outsiders — as Chinese Indonesians from Bagansiapi-api — introduces an additional layer of complexity. Why were the *toke*, residents of Cilacap for more than twenty years and whose children had been born and raised in the town, still referred to as *pendatang*? Furthermore, we need to recognise the cultural and ethnic distinction arising from the conflict over *Jumat Kliwon*. The violence against Chinese-Indonesian trawlers revealed a complexity of tensions and grievances that local fishermen had accumulated over many years. Although their protest was essentially an economic one, it is clear that for the fishermen the ethnicity of the *toke* and their 'other-ness' was an important aspect of these grievances. Events a few weeks later in Bagansiapi-api, the Riau fishing town from which the Chinese-Indonesian *toke* originated, rule out an assessment of this violence in simply economic terms and compel us to confront its ethnic dimension.

Bagansiapi-api, 15 September 1998

The people have no food.¹³⁵

In Bagansiapi-api on the east coast of Sumatra in Riau province, on 13 September 1998 a fight broke out between two youths — Zulkifli

bin Ibrahim, a *pribumi*, and Supardi, a Chinese Indonesian — after they had been involved in a motorcycle collision. Two days later, rumours circulated that Zulkifli had died on the way to hospital in Pekanbaru as a result of injuries inflicted by the ethnic Chinese youth. That evening of 15 September, around three thousand people from various parts of Bagansiapi-api converged on Bagan Kota district, the economic centre of the city and home to a Chinese-Indonesian majority. The crowds set fire to houses and shops in the area, destroying approximately five hundred buildings — shops, houses, a clinic, a cinema and a billiard hall. Places of worship, including a temple, were also attacked. The next day troops from the army, the mobile brigade and the regional police were deployed from Dumai and Pekanbaru and 31 suspects were detained. At the time of the violence many Chinese Indonesians had fled Bagansiapi-api seeking refuge in nearby towns and larger cities.¹³⁶ Others were sheltered by their *pribumi* neighbours or sought sanctuary at police stations or the district offices. Schools remained closed for three days and a 24-hour neighbourhood security patrol was maintained.

Days after the violence, groups representing local Chinese Indonesians, Malay, Javanese, Buginese and Batak communities met for an *upacara silaturahmi* (friendship ceremony) to demonstrate their commitment to harmony and the re-building of Bagansiapi-api. Despite the violence, they insisted that relations between Chinese Indonesians and the rest of the community were amiable, 'For a long time the Chinese and the community here have lived in harmony.'¹³⁷ Local authorities stressed that the proceedings of the meeting that day did not in any way constitute a 'peace agreement' for the simple reason that there was no war to begin with.

'Fishy' Relations

Every sudden change in policies or regulations by any Government might indeed upset certain established systems or investment, but compared with the aim of reaching social peace and stability, by way of providing better protection to the poor traditional fishermen mass, the disadvantages become very minor (Imam Sardjono, Director General of Fisheries, 1980).¹³⁸

With a population of some 50,000 people, Bagansiapi-api is one of Indonesia's major fishing ports and was once one of the largest in the world, exporting dried fish, dried prawns and shrimp paste.¹³⁹ From the late nineteenth until the late twentieth century, the role of Chinese Indonesians in its fishing industry was a major part of this success. Until

the 1950s Bagansiapi-api had been a Chinese town.¹⁴⁰ In 1998 ethnic Chinese made up at least a third of the local population and generally worked as businessmen or *toke*, although one news report was careful to note that they also occupied 'normal' jobs alongside non-Chinese such as policemen and teachers.¹⁴¹ However, Bagansiapi-api's fishing industry, though still substantial at the end of the 1990s, was a mere shadow of that in colonial times, or even during the late 1960s and 1970s, when a technological revolution in fishing saw it play a key role in Indonesian fisheries.

Connor Bailey describes 1966 as a 'watershed year' for Indonesia's fishing industry as a whole and for Bagansiapi-api in particular.¹⁴² That year, through their family connections with ethnic Chinese fishermen in Malaysia, Chinese-Indonesian fishermen from Bagansiapi-api brought fishing trawlers (*pukat harimau*) to Indonesia for the first time. During the 1970s trawling spread throughout Indonesia, to the north coast of Java, but also to Cilacap in south Central Java, the only port conducive to trawling along that coastline. Cilacap's shallow seas and sandy seabed made it suitable for trawling for prawns.¹⁴³ The trawler was so identified with the place where it was first used in Indonesia that it became known locally as 'Bagansiapi-api trawler'. Although Chinese Indonesians were the initial and perhaps the principal investors in trawlers, by 1980 many non-Chinese also had an interest in the industry. By the early 1970s around eight hundred Indonesian trawlers were operating in the Malacca Straits alone and between 1975 and 1977 their total number increased by 70 per cent. As a consequence of such rapid growth, by 1979 it was obvious that the Malacca Straits and the north coast of Java were being overfished and that the trawlers were marginalising traditional or small-scale fishermen in these areas. In the last years of the 1970s, the Indonesian Fishers' Association lobbied the government against the trawlers and for the rights of small-scale fisherman. Bailey and others believe, however, that in fact 'it was the willingness of small-scale fishers to resort to violence that prompted decisive action on the part of the Indonesian government'.¹⁴⁴ No official reports of this violence exist, but there were many accounts given of casualties and of damage to boats from this time.¹⁴⁵

In October 1980 Suharto issued Presidential Decree No. 39 imposing a ban on the use of trawlers in waters off Java and Sumatra. This was followed by Presidential Instruction No. 11 of 1981, which extended the ban nationwide and coincided with the issuing of a variety of 'affirmative action' Presidential decrees. These included Presidential Decision No. 14a of 1980, which stated that no less than half of the

capital should be owned by *pribumi*.¹⁴⁶ The trawler ban was by most accounts enforced, though it was possible to continue operating these boats by simply altering some of the gear and therefore no longer being, by strict definition, a trawler. The loss of the trawlers forced the local economy of Bagansiapi-api into a rapid decline as earnings from shrimp exports ceased. The void left by the trawlers led to an influx of new labour entering the industry, but these small-scale operations did not yield the same export earnings. In 1992 the local government in Bagansiapi-api exerted more pressure on the remaining operators when it formed the Association of Fishermen for the purpose of collecting dues from local fish traders. The association also enforced protective measures to regulate the industry and sought rents from boat owners. As a consequence there emerged smuggling rackets, which took premium produce to markets overseas, thereby making it more and more difficult to find a quality product to sell in the domestic market. Jobs were lost and the local economy suffered.

'Where There is Smoke ...'

Despite the emphatic message promoted at the 'friendship ceremony', relations between Chinese Indonesians and *pribumi* in Bagansiapi-api had been slowly deteriorating for some time. For example, in 1997–98 as a consequence of the economic downturn, sponsorship programmes for local youth groups and community activities run by Chinese-Indonesian business groups, which had helped to maintain harmony between local groups, were abandoned, further straining relations. Economic stresses created a context in which anti-Chinese sentiment had the potential to escalate. Although the violence in Bagansiapi-api broke out after a minor altercation between a *pribumi* and a Chinese Indonesian, local people viewed it as inevitable. Indeed, some reports described Chinese Indonesians in Bagansiapi-api as being prepared for 'something like this' to occur.¹⁴⁷ In some neighbourhoods where Chinese Indonesians lived, residents had prepared to defend themselves with spears, knives, batons and dogs. The chief of police described the atmosphere in Bagansiapi-api before the September violence as being on edge — the threat was certain, but it was not known where or when it would appear.¹⁴⁸

There is evidence that the violence on the evening of 15 September was to some extent organised or at least co-ordinated. The leader of the local branch of the Communication Forum for National Unity (Bakom PKB), Candra — a Chinese Indonesian whose own home was destroyed

— testified seeing people in the crowd throwing plastic bags filled with gasoline onto the roofs of houses and shops.¹⁴⁹ Police later arrested three men they suspected of being the ‘brains’ behind the operation, at least two of whom were members of the local youth group ‘Bendahara’,¹⁵⁰ although they were careful to insist that the involvement of these individuals did not implicate the organisation as a whole.

Links to Cilacap?: ‘Fish and Firebombs’¹⁵¹ Revisited

Eighteen years after the ban on trawlers was issued, these boats continued to operate in large numbers out of the Cilacap harbour. Simple gear changes may have avoided the ban, as would ‘co-operation’ from officials, many of whom were ‘scornful’ of the trawler ban as they saw it as the most productive means available to the industry. Generally, Suharto’s weakening power from the early 1990s may have allowed the enforcement of the ban to ‘slip’.¹⁵² The violence targeting Chinese Indonesians in both Cilacap and Bagansiapi-api, occurring just two weeks apart, would not have been a coincidence. Although on different islands and facing different seas, the link between these fishing industries and past anti-trawler violence connect these incidents. The *toke* in Cilacap continued to be identified with Bagansiapi-api. Rumours of more trawlers arriving from Bagansiapi-api, perceived as a threat by the fishermen at Cilacap, indicate that communication between these two fishing towns was frequent, and that relations between Chinese Indonesians and *pribumi* were similarly competitive and hostile.

Yet, the crowds in Bagansiapi-api in mid-September 1998 did not target trawlers or *toke* for violence, but other Chinese-Indonesian property. Neither did this violence originate from a protest for higher wages, but followed a brawl between a Chinese Indonesian and *pribumi*. The operation of illegal trawlers was not the only source of antagonism between these communities in Bagansiapi-api, nor was demanding better working conditions the objective. Riau’s police commander stopped short of stating that there was a link with the violence elsewhere in Indonesia, but instead pointed to the similar pattern of the violence in Bagansiapi-api with other places in which an issue involving a *pribumi* and a Chinese Indonesian led to wider violence.¹⁵³ As he quite rightly stated, it cannot be said that the ‘same’ actors were involved in each of these incidents, but news of the Cilacap violence would have been heard by those in Bagansiapi-api who were experiencing similar economic strains and held the same sorts of resentments towards the large Chinese-Indonesian community there.

Kebumen, 7 September 1998

[A]ctually it was really only a normal quarrel between an employee and his boss. However, as it passed from mouth to mouth, it developed into mistreatment and battering (Kapolwil Deddy).¹⁵⁴

Just over a week after the violence in Cilacap, an incident involving a Chinese-Indonesian employer and her employee led to violence in the nearby town of Kebumen, Central Java. On 7 September 1998 Sukiman, a 22-year-old employee of Yohanes and Elizabeth, the owners of automobile spare-parts shop 'Toko Rego Agung' on Jalan Pahlawan was heard sobbing by some of his friends who worked at the nearby minibus terminal. Sukiman was well known to the men who worked on the minibuses that pulled in to the terminal on Jalan Pahlawan, as they often shopped for fuel and spare parts at Toko Rego Agung. That morning Sukiman was extremely distressed. When his friends asked him what was wrong, he told them that he had been scolded severely and beaten by his boss Elizabeth for spilling oil in the shop. The small group of minibus workers was familiar with the harsh way in which the owners of Toko Rego Agung treated their staff and were particularly aware of Elizabeth's fiery temper and erratic behaviour. As customers of the shop, the minibus workers themselves had cause for grievances against Yohanes and Elizabeth. Increases in their prices had been unpredictable and requests for credits were always refused.¹⁵⁵ The minibus workers felt for Sukiman, whom they perceived had tolerated and endured so much during seven years working for the couple. After hearing Sukiman's story they grew angry at his obvious distress and humiliation and a small group, swollen by becak drivers, market workers and passers-by, gathered in front of the shop situated only 50 metres from the terminal.

Yohanes and Elizabeth ran from their home as the crowd approached. At some point a few members of the minibus crews went to a nearby warung for a can of oil, which they then used to set fire to tyres in front of the shop. It was not long before the fire had spread to the shop and engulfed its contents which, ironically, included Sukiman's own car, for which he had saved for many years and used to visit his mother in his village once a month.

By mid-morning the minibus terminal at Jalan Pahlawan had become busy with passengers arriving from nearby villages and returning school children. Many of them joined the crowd that was now moving on from Toko Rego Agung to other shops close by, most of which sold spare parts, tyres and oil. Some witnesses report that they heard people

shouting, 'Chinese are too much! Chinese Dogs! Burn! Burn, burn everything! What are you waiting for!' Witnesses claim the language and dialect used by those shouting these slogans was not local. One witness went so far to claim, 'The accent was like that of a Solonese. It definitely wasn't the Kebumen dialect.'¹⁵⁶ Over 80 shops, houses and factories in central Kebumen as well as dozens of vehicles and public facilities such as pot plants and street signs were looted, burned and destroyed at an estimated total cost of Rp5 billion.

Conditions for Violence: Economic Stresses and Urban Poor

There is a phenomenon that things are easily ignited because the situation is very difficult (Endro Suyitno, Head of the Regional Assembly, Central Java).¹⁵⁷

In Central Java in the months before the violence of 7 September, the price of rice had increased from Rp800 to Rp2,500 per kilogram.¹⁵⁸ Kebumen's local economy had become increasingly strained since the beginning of the *krismon* period. Workers retrenched from their jobs as maids and labourers in Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore, which had also been hit by the crisis, were returning to Kebumen and surrounding villages. This was a double blow for not only were their wages in foreign currency no longer coming in to buoy the local economy, but they now also added to the growing numbers of the town's unemployed.

At this time supporters of reform in Kebumen, including Chinese-Indonesian businessmen, members of local government, Police and Army formed an alliance, the Social Welfare Forum (*Forum Kepedulian Sosial*, FKS) led by the mayor, to campaign for decreases in the prices of basic goods and to distribute aid. Its main concern was the urban poor, whom they believed to have been hardest hit by the price rises. Unlike the villagers who had some level of subsistence to cushion the impact of price increases, the urban poor would be devastated by them. From July until September 1998 the FKS operated a cheap market at which they sold subsidised basic goods to the urban poor. On 4 September, a few days before the violence, Bulog once again raised the price of rice by more than Rp1,000 per kilogram. Protests by the mayor to the local distribution centre (Dulog) asking that FKS be allowed to sell cheaper rice were refused. Very soon rice and cooking oil began to disappear from markets and shopkeepers in Kebumen were quickly suspected of hoarding. In this tense atmosphere Sukiman's tears became a powerful symbol of the pain experienced by many at this time. His

suffering at the hands of a Chinese-Indonesian employer was easily perceived as mirroring their own.

Chinese Indonesians in Kebumen who worked closely with other local groups in an effort to promote social harmony in the town were ashamed and angered by Yohanes' and Elizabeth's actions against Sukiman. Many of them had in fact long been wary of the potential damage this couple could do to relations between Chinese Indonesians and non-Chinese in Kebumen. A leader of FKS, Yunarto Arif stated that he had feared that the infamously rude couple could bring undone years of work by other Chinese Indonesians to assimilate into the local community.¹⁵⁹ Yohanes, Elizabeth and the rest of the local Chinese-Indonesian community were bound to each other by a social perception of their common ethnicity, no matter how different their politics, attitudes or behaviour.

Chinese Indonesians in Kebumen: Against the Odds

According to history racial riots have occurred in Kebumen four times. First in 1928, then in 1942, 1965 and finally in 1998. You can ask older people who had the opportunity to experience it (Yanarto Arif, FKS).¹⁶⁰

The buildings selected by the crowd — or, as the evidence indicates, by certain 'leaders' — for vandalism and violence were mostly Chinese-Indonesian shops and homes as well as some banks and public facilities. The words '*pribumi*', '*muslim*' and '*pro-reformasi*' were scrawled on the doors of many of the buildings which the crowd passed over. Kebumen is described as a *kota santri* or devout city: with almost 99 per cent of its inhabitants being Muslim, it had 91 *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and 4,500 mosques. During the revolutionary period of the 1940s it was the birthplace of several Islamic militia groups.

In the 1990s Kebumen became the focus for new investment, mostly by Chinese Indonesians in textiles, a sector that traditionally had been dominated by *pribumi*. During the same period the first supermarkets opened in Kebumen, with Chinese Indonesians again playing a major role. In a pattern we recognise from Tasikmalaya and repeated across the nation, these investments led to the displacement of traditional markets and many small shops owned and operated by *pribumi*. There was a general belief that Chinese Indonesians did better in business because of their links to Golkar and practices of corruption, collusion and nepotism under the New Order. Cholidy Ibhar, head of the local branch of the Communication Forum for National Unity (Bakom PKB), believed that

the devout community in Kebumen considered Chinese Indonesians to be 'infidels' and, because of the difference in religion and culture, felt that they could never participate fully in the life of the community.¹⁶¹

At the same time, many Chinese-Indonesian residents, well aware of the difficulties in relations between ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese in Kebumen, had been working hard to preserve harmony in the city through groups like FKS. Many like Tun Han Jan (aka Handoko), the owner of a plastics factory, had donated a significant amounts of money to assist the poor in Kebumen and no doubt had spent much more over the years to pay for security. Under the New Order regime this strategy had proved very successful. Since 1965 until this incident — as Yunarto Arif recounted — no significant 'racial' violence had occurred in the town. However, after the violence in early September 1998 many Chinese Indonesians in Kebumen, including Handoko, began to question these methods: 'Since I was small I have attended school, worked and lived with indigenous people. My concern about these problems is not any less. But still I become a target and victim every time there is a problem or crisis.'¹⁶²

Spontan Saja?

I have been studying why it is that Kebumen, which for a long time was a peaceful and calm region, had this riot. Certainly there are factors and reasons, which are internal and external.... I see a red thread running between the riots in Bondowoso, Tasikmalaya and Pekalongan spreading to Cilacap and then Kebumen ... (Kebumen Mayor, H. Amin Soedibyo).¹⁶³

From the outset the police and local leaders refused to accept that the violence was a result of spontaneous actions by local residents reacting to the injustice done to Sukiman. The Commander of the army's Diponegoro Division (Central Java) insisted that the violence had nothing to do with Sukiman but was orchestrated: 'In this case clearly there were those who heated up, agitated and orchestrated.'¹⁶⁴ Evidence was presented to demonstrate that the violence had been systematic and organised to the point that it had a 'commander' and there was a 'list' of targets. This level of planning was made clear when the owner of Sinar Baru offered the leaders of the crowd Rp10 million to spare his shop, but they refused it on the basis that the shop was 'on the list' and 'must be burned'.¹⁶⁵ The existence of a list, or even the ready acceptance by the authorities that such a list existed and that the violence against

the Chinese Indonesians was led or *didalangi* not only indicated the prevalence of such terms and analysis in the discourse of the authorities, but also the way in which this behaviour was part of the accepted array of activities in this community. Significantly, the presence of ‘leaders’ of the crowds and ‘lists’ demonstrates that a riot system was at work and that despite sustained efforts at assimilation made by sections of the local Chinese-Indonesian community, their security still could not be guaranteed. However, firm evidence is lacking that this ‘system’ was the same or linked to the violence in the other places mentioned by Soedibyo, Kebumen’s mayor. It is more probable that a remembering or mimicking of those and other incidents of violence against ethnic Chinese in history were in some way ‘taken on’ by those involved in this case, as well as others.

Rebuilding Relations

The history of racialised violence in Kebumen, beginning in the 1920s and including 1965, is typical of the remembering in towns and villages across the country. In Kebumen the ‘system’ worked just as effectively after the New Order as it did under the regime. Evidence that it existed independently of agents from the New Order regime may be found in the fact that in Kebumen it was effectively shut down during the years the regime was in power. Arrangements between wealthy Chinese-Indonesian businessmen in the town and leaders in the government and military can explain this. After the downfall of the New Order, guarantees of security given by the mayor and the local chief of police had little impact and no amount of good deeds within the community by Chinese-Indonesian groups could satisfy this renewed desire for justice among the people of Kebumen, nor suppress their recently acquired capacity to demand it.

Local Chinese-Indonesian leader Yunarto Arif believes that relations between ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese were severely damaged by the violence in early September 1998. He claims that the processes of assimilation and harmony between groups that had been working for so long were all but destroyed following the violence as each group became newly suspicious of the other. With another twenty Chinese-Indonesian business people, he formed the Communication Forum for the Victims of the 7 September Kebumen Riot (*Forum Komunikasi Korban Kerusuhan Kebumen, 7 September*) because, he explains, despite assurances from community leaders that they would be protected, the Chinese Indonesians

in Kebumen needed to work together for a solution, 'We established the forum in a spontaneous way because we feel we share the same destiny. We want to ask, can we still be given the opportunity to work here or not?'¹⁶⁶

In forming this new group to assist the victims of the violence, Arif and other Kebumen Chinese Indonesians greatly changed their outlook regarding their participation and future in Kebumen. They shifted from a position of making deliberate efforts to assimilate and to assist the indigenous urban poor, to questioning whether there was a place for them in that community after all. They began to demonstrate a sense of helplessness that no amount of effort or money could make *pribumi* perceive them as 'belonging'. It is possible that for these people and this community, this sense of helplessness and rejection was valid. Conversely, it is also possible that Yunarto Arif and other Chinese Indonesians in Kebumen had also misunderstood what they believed to be harmonious and amiable relations with *pribumi* over the previous 30 years. Perhaps they were simply naïve not to see that during the New Order years, when they had been part of the government's development efforts. They had, at a price, been shielded by the security apparatus from what would otherwise have been real hostility. In the aftermath of the violence, some Chinese-Indonesian residents recognised they needed a new approach to relations with non-Chinese in Kebumen. They realised that they needed to participate in activities such as neighbourhood security operations and that they needed to contribute towards finding long-term solutions for social problems.

Holis

A Prelude: Ketapang, Ambon and Christian versus Muslim

Potential social conflicts have long remained buried and unaddressed because of the decades-long security approach imposed by the state (Rusdi Muchtar, LIPI).¹⁶⁷

(T)he religion which has been slandered is Christianity and the race which has been slandered is Chinese. Why is this so? Because they are the same: there are people in the government channelling money to the Christians (Aendra H. Medita).¹⁶⁸

On 22 November 1998 a fight broke out in Ketapang, Jakarta between the Ambonese guard of a gambling house and a rival group. This was less than a week after a four-day Special Session of the People's Consultative

Assembly (MPR) had convened on 12 November to discuss modifications to election laws. Thousands of armed troops, police and paramilitaries surrounded the parliament in an extreme show of force and intimidation to defend the Session against student protesters. However, in violent clashes with student demonstrators in which security forces used tear gas and fired bullets, sixteen people, including nine students, were killed.

A rumour had circulated in Ketapang that Christian Ambonese had torched a mosque. Locals responded by attacking churches, Christian schools, houses, vehicles and other property. Fourteen people were killed, some of them after being lynched on the street by groups of men and their bodies mutilated. One week later in Kupang, West Timor, in an apparent act of retaliation for the Ketapang violence, four mosques were burned, five others damaged and houses and shops also destroyed.¹⁶⁹ Seventeen people were injured. Benjamin Mangkoedilaga from the National Commission for Human Rights (Komnas HAM), investigated the Kupang violence in December 1998 and concluded that there was no indication of retaliation but that it was ‘plotted so that it looked like an inter-religion conflict’.¹⁷⁰ However, he noted that it was perception, rather than the facts about responsibility for this violence, that mattered. In January 1999 the first serious fighting broke out between Muslims and Christians in Ambon. More than fifty people were killed in what was the beginning of a conflict that has continued until the present day. In February 2002 the International Crisis Group estimated that at least 5,000 people (perhaps as many as 10,000) had been killed.¹⁷¹

The violence at Ketapang was quickly represented and interpreted across Indonesia not as a gangland war for control of inner-city territory, but rather as Muslim–Christian violence. Governors and military commanders warned of more to come. Though these cases involved non-Chinese ethnic groups, the new and ready presence of Muslim–Christian violence within the national discourse meant that Chinese Indonesians were aware that violence against Christian Chinese and others remained a possibility. The validity of conspiracy theories such as that touted by journalist Aendra H. Medita, cited at the beginning of this paragraph, was of little consequence to them.

7 March 1999

The potential for a riot in West Java is sufficiently great. Don’t wait until a riot like that in Ambon occurs in West Java. To ensure this, we have to be proactive (Governor of West Java, Nuriana, 20 January 1999).¹⁷²

On the morning of Sunday 7 March 1999, dozens of people gathered at the entrance to the Taman Rahayu luxury housing estate of Holis on the southern outskirts of Bandung. They included people from a nearby kampung who had come to protest about the use of a shophouse on the housing estate as an unauthorised place of Christian worship. How the crowd came to assemble at the entrance to the housing estate is told in a number of ways by local residents, the police and the wider Bandung community. It is known for certain that the crowd, once inside the estate, moved directly to the shophouse used for prayer meetings and religious ceremonies by followers of the evangelical Christian group Ho Kim Tong and ransacked its contents. They then moved to Taman Holis, another housing estate only three kilometres away. At Taman Holis the group went directly to a three-storey building which housed a kindergarten and primary school run by a Christian organisation. Windows and doors in the building were broken and the contents of some of the rooms destroyed.¹⁷³ The crowd then progressed to a third housing estate, Taman Kopo Indah II, where they reportedly broke windows in ten shophouses before being stopped by crowd control troops in the mid-afternoon.

There are conflicting reports about the level of spontaneity of this protest. Some local residents report that just before the attack on the Ho Kim Tong building, a *becak* driver was involved in a collision with a car driven by a Chinese Indonesian.¹⁷⁴ Allegedly, when the car failed to stop after the accident, a group of *becak* drivers in the area moved to the Taman Rahayu estate, from where it was assumed the car had come. Existing grievances and complaints regarding the extra traffic caused by people coming and going to services at the Ho Kim Tong building in the estate — almost all of whom were ethnic Chinese — became the focus for their frustration following the collision. In this case the ensuing violence was described as ‘spontaneous’. Others maintain that at least some of the participants in the violence arrived at the estate in trucks from outside the area and that those who carried out the violence were not locals, ‘What I know is that the “masses” mentioned were not residents from around the complex. I did not recognise their faces.’¹⁷⁵ Members of local NGOs also believe this to be the case. Police arrested ‘provocateurs’, who included recidivist criminals. It was only when extra people arrived at the gates to the estate, allegedly in trucks, and began to incite the people gathered to force their way onto the estate, that the crowd became violent.

'Strange Churches', Permits and Urban Sprawl

The level of tension with regard to the Ho Kim Tong 'church' was well known in the area. This was not the first time that the residents of the nearby kampung had protested about the noise levels generated by music and singing coming from the shophouse, and also about the increased traffic through the kampung on days when the congregation met, which was not restricted to Sundays. Previously they had made complaints to the estate manager as well as the church leaders themselves and had even approached leaders from other Christian churches to ask that they put their complaints to Ho Kim Tong. However the situation had never improved. Despite this dispute, locals reported that before the violence on 7 March there had not been any significant acrimony between the kampung residents and Chinese Indonesians living in the luxury housing estates. They claim that everyday relations between these groups were harmonious, admitting though that tension and resentment lay just below the surface. The local police commander claimed it was only after the Ho Kim Tong began to use the shophouse in Taman Rahayu as a place of worship that conflicts between these groups began to emerge.¹⁷⁶

Bandung residents variously describe the Ho Kim Tong Christian church as '*gereja aneh*' (strange church) and '*gereja karismatik*' (charismatic church). Established by Chinese-Indonesian Christians in Bandung, the church is evangelical, with services involving loud music and prayer.¹⁷⁷ For two years before the March 1999 attack the congregation had used the shophouse at Taman Rahayu as a meeting place for prayer and ceremonies, yet failed to obtain a permit from the Department of Religion to establish a church. Following the attack, representatives from the Department maintained that the congregation had been sent letters to remind them of their obligation to gain its permission before they could conduct religious services there. This permission was, one representative explained, dependent on the support of local residents. It appears that initially the locals, many of whom worked in houses on the estate and therefore in whose interest it was to avoid conflict, were tolerant of the presence of the church at Taman Rahayu. However, the unwillingness of church leaders to compromise on issues such as noise levels and traffic meant that this opportunity was missed. Locals started to view the presence of the 'church' in more general terms as a violation of laws regarding the establishment of churches, that is, as a religious and legal issue rather than as a dispute to be settled through local mediation. 'We have already protested because using it as a place of worship is not

in keeping with the function of that building. What is more, most residents in this area are Muslim.¹⁷⁸ Re-focusing this dispute from a neighbourhood squabble to a conflict over the legality of the 'church' was a crucial development. Controversy and disputation over the right to establish churches already constituted a nationwide discourse. Events at Situbondo and Tasikmalaya previously examined, are examples of the deterioration of this debate into violence.

Before the development of the three 'luxury' housing estates, the land on the outskirts of the city of Bandung had been covered with rice-fields and kampungs. During the expansion of the city in the early 1990s, developers bought up land on the southern periphery, situated conveniently just off the toll road ringing the city. As a result, kampung dwellers, most of whom were very poor, found themselves living alongside the rich and in many cases became reliant on them for work. The continuing economic pressures before and after Suharto's resignation created conditions described by one Holis resident as so tense that they were almost at breaking point.

Most homes and shophouses damaged during the violence on the three estates were owned or occupied by Chinese Indonesians. This can be stated with confidence because most residents living in the 'luxury' estates were Chinese Indonesian. The two buildings inside these estates targeted directly by the crowd — the shophouses at Blok A Taman Rahayu and the kindergarten and primary school at Taman Holis — were both associated with Christian groups, of which most followers in this area were also Chinese Indonesian. Although it is difficult to say definitively who made up the 'crowd' involved in the violence that day, or even why they chose that morning to escalate the level of their protest about the shophouse, it can be said that to an extent these targets were pre-determined and that some of the actors were skilled. This was not quite a spontaneous event, but neither was it a planned action by outsiders as an attempt to destabilise the area. Local knowledge and previous grievances were the basis for this action, but the conditions or 'predisposition' dictating how the crowd were able to assemble, to turn to violence and why they were not stopped were much wider than that.

An Absence of Surprise

As the explanation goes ... they have already known for two years that they were violating the law, namely carrying out religious services in a shophouse. But why didn't the security apparatus take any action against them? (HM Daud Gunawan).¹⁷⁹

Actually since three months ago we have already anticipated something like this. However because the situation is now different, for example there is the case of Ambon ... The people's emotions can easily become difficult (Governor of West Java, Nuriana).¹⁸⁰

This admission by the Governor of West Java and the general lack of surprise in response to the violence at Holis points to both the level of tension and also the normalcy of violence in society at the time, particularly concerning issues involving religious and ethnic difference. It indicates also that, whilst condemning it, political and military leaders still regarded violence as inevitable. This was in line with the New Order taboos around SARA issues, which considered conflict unavoidable without controls. Six weeks before the violence at Holis, the Governor had warned of the potential for violence, declaring, 'I can't see what direction it will come from. But we must prevent it. There has not yet been an occurrence, but we should not be deceived by the calm. So prepare the umbrella before the rain'.¹⁸¹

While some locals describe the conditions in Bandung at that time as being at breaking point, others qualify this by saying that the tension was no more and no less than had been 'normal' over the previous three years. A Chinese-Indonesian businessman and artisan in Bandung stressed that ethnic Chinese in Bandung had been living in fear of an outbreak of widespread violence since the violence against Chinese Indonesians and Christians in the adjacent West Java towns of Tasikmalaya and Rengasdengklok in late 1996 and early 1997.¹⁸² At that time he and some of his Chinese-Indonesian friends had been so alarmed that they had written to foreign embassies requesting protection but they had been too afraid even to sign these letters. The 'memory' of violent incidents against churches on the basis of disputes over their legality and applications for permits helps to explain the outbreak of violence at Holis. In the same way that this Bandung businessman draws on the memory of his fear during the attacks in Rengasdengklok and Tasikmalaya, examples of previous violence enabled locals at Holis and those who led them to perceive the legitimacy of their actions.

Following the violence, a disturbing and potentially inflammatory debate emerged in the public sphere, providing further evidence that this local incident was part of a much larger and growing national trend associated with a more assertive stance by some Islamic groups. Islamic leaders from various local groups accused the Police and the Department of Religion of prejudice against non-Christian groups because they had failed to prosecute churches operating without the appropriate permit.

'When the police apparatus have a discriminatory attitude it is clearly destroying the police corps entirely So we appeal that the police apparatus immediately act to arrest, investigate or detain those who have clearly violated the law.'¹⁸³ The mayor of Bandung admitted to sympathy with the frustration of the local people over the status of the church, commenting that 'a shophouse is only for living and trading in. Not for religious services.'¹⁸⁴ Ironically, Muslims in Bandung and across Indonesia believed that they were victims of inequity and bias in the system.

CONCLUSION

How can we explain the alarming complicity of 'good people' to outbreaks of radical violence perpetrated by the state, police, military and ethnic groups? (Nancy Scheper-Hughes)¹⁸⁵

In January 1999 Alwi Shihab, Dean of the Paramadinamulya University in Jakarta, highlighted the connection between a government that was failing the people and the violence:

What happens at the bottom levels (of society) usually reflects the situation at the top levels If the people believe that the government has failed to find a solution to their problems, they will find their own way. This is very dangerous for our country in the future.¹⁸⁶

Shihab's assessment sheds light on the impetus behind violence in Cilacap and Holis where people revolted against fellow residents whom they believed were blatantly breaking laws and against whom the government would not act. In Cilacap the flashpoint was a law restricting trawlers and in Holis it was over permits to establish a church. In both cases, those 'breaking' the laws were Chinese Indonesians who did so with the help of corrupt officials. Yet it is too simple to say these were movements in favour of rule of law. Why choose these particular targets when corruption in the bureaucracy, police and military was rife? These cases point to another clue in the context of *reformasi* and escalating violence in this transitional period. Like the cases of community justice in East Java in the late 1990s,¹⁸⁷ many Indonesians interpreted *reformasi* as a new freedom to resolve injustices, perceived or real, by means of mass mobilisation. Like the students at the Parliament in mid-May 1998, local groups recognised their power to oppose the source of their hardship and those 'breaking the law'. In Cilacap and Holis local residents involved in the attacks on Chinese-Indonesian property may also have attacked

these targets because they were not so close to the centre of power as to prove risky. Some of the Chinese Indonesians targeted had broken laws, but at the same time the officials and bureaucrats who had allowed the laws to be flouted and profited from it, were not attacked.

In Bagansiapi-api and Kebumen, violence against Chinese-Indonesian property was driven not so much by a sense of injustice by the infringement of particular laws, as by personal grievances and general frustration attached to prejudices against Chinese Indonesians. Like many past incidents of anti-Chinese violence, the alleged beating of a *pribumi* by an ethnic Chinese precipitated the widespread violence. These were both communities that appeared to have achieved high levels of assimilation or tolerance between ethnic Chinese and *pribumi* residents. Chinese-Indonesian businesses had actively encouraged this through sponsorship of community programmes. Nevertheless, violence exposed ethnic prejudices, or specifically, anti-Chinese sentiments, which many believed to have been long buried.

Violence against Chinese Indonesians in the late New Order period is commonly agreed to have been a political tool used by both the leaders and the challengers of the autocratic regime. After May 1998 it is no longer possible to explain anti-Chinese violence by tracing the chain of responsibility directly to the government or military, or its political challengers. However, the public sentiments that allowed the 'anti-Chinese riot' to gain the influence it had under the New Order existed after Suharto resigned. Whilst the 'anti-Chinese riot' as a discourse may have lost its political power,¹⁸⁸ local communities still deemed that there was something to be gained from anti-Chinese violence, though perhaps the purpose was now different.

If, as Heryanto argued, 'In the final analysis the violence serve[d] the interests of the [New Order] regime,'¹⁸⁹ for what purpose or for whom was further violence being carried out once the New Order regime had gone? We must consider the motives and therefore the agency of local actors more closely.¹⁹⁰ What is revealed by such analysis are the raw prejudices within local contexts, the powerful stereotyping of ethnic Chinese which has endured and the local 'riot systems' which have also remained after the end of the regime. The conspiracy theories of the Suharto period could no longer satisfactorily explain this violence. It could no longer be described in terms of '*ada provokator*'¹⁹¹ (there was a provocateur) or that '*pihak tertentu*' (certain sides) were responsible. Instead the agency of the individual should be considered: 'maybe deep inside us we are defending an unpleasant feeling towards this particular

racial group'.¹⁹² If this is no longer 'racialised state terrorism', then what is it? And if society now has new opportunities to express its frustration, why continue to choose Chinese Indonesians as targets? Violence in the transitional period can be examined in the broader social context of forces for retribution and justice-seeking at a time when the *reformasi* state was weak and failing to live up to people's high expectations. *Reformasi* protests demanded introduction of a rule of law under which violations such as corruption and collusion were no longer to be tolerated. The motives for these incidents of violence after the end of the New Order originated from within local systems and from local memories of how to carry them out, not through channels of military or paramilitary command. This was people power.

At the same time, this violence was also increasingly set within the context of a push for greater representation of Islam. Concerns about the expansion of Christian churches and disputes regarding permits for building churches were common features. Fears of Christianisation felt by Muslims across Indonesia, and particularly on Java, were due to a failure to administer regulations on church building, but were also closely linked to fears of marginalisation within a rapidly developing economy in the mid-1990s. In early January 1998 at the height of the economic crisis, groups like KISDI, with the backing of the Kopassus and later Kostrad chief, Prabowo, and also outspoken and extremist elements of the Indonesian Islamic teachers and clerics Council (MUI), created an atmosphere in which these fears were heightened. Sermons at mosques across the country and political demonstrations on the streets of Jakarta spoke about the validity of a religious or holy war against traitors and infidels.

It is therefore very interesting that in the violence against Chinese in this transitional period from late May 1998 until November 1999, with the exception of the violence against ethnic Chinese Christians in Holis, non-Islamic religious symbols were not targeted. This is a marked difference from the violence experienced in 1996–97 in Situbondo, Tasikmalaya and Rengasdengklok and also in Java in early 1998, when churches and temples were constant targets. Instead the violence against Chinese-Indonesian property in Kebumen, Cilacap and Bagansiapi-api was, as Alwi Shihab commented, related to a disconnection between the aspirations of the people and the ability of a transitional government to deliver it. *Reformasi* stood for democratic government and justice. In the absence of institutions capable of providing this, local communities acted on their own against those perceived as wrong-doers. However, this

process was still linked to ethnically structured ways of seeing and feeling injustice and carrying out retribution. In the same way, the violence at Holis against the illegal use of a shophouse for religious functions can be seen as an exasperated response to the corruption and ineffectiveness of government ten months after the end of the New Order. Again, the targets of this frustration were not the corrupt officials who allowed the shophouse to continue to function, but its Chinese Indonesian congregation.

The general absence of attacks on non-Islamic symbols within the context of anti-Chinese violence supports the argument that in the period before Suharto's resignation, violence against Chinese could be seen as an expression of attempts within Islam 'to create a legitimate space for itself in the public domain — especially in view of the homogenising pressures of the modern state'.¹⁹³ With *reformasi* came the political and social freedoms that allowed Islamic groups to re-claim this public role legitimately, and they moved quickly to do so. In such a move at the end of July 1998, the Committee of Islamic Clerics for Constitutional Reform (*Komite Umat Islam untuk Reformasi Konstitusional*) called for repeal of the requirement for social organisations and political parties to adopt Pancasila as their *azas tunggal*: 'Pancasila as the basis for the nation, Yes; Pancasila as the sole foundation for social organisations, No.'¹⁹⁴ A spokesman for the group explained their position, 'Pancasila as the sole foundation is not in line with the spirit of *reformasi* which calls for openness and freedom in the lives of the people, the nation and the state.'¹⁹⁵ However, as revealed by the sentiments expressed in the debate over permits related to Christian places of worship and highlighted in the Holis case, fears of Christianisation were still prominent. The failure of Islamic groups to make claims through these 'legitimate' channels would potentially give rise to further violence, particularly in the context of the commencement of fierce fighting between Christians and Muslims in Ambon in November 1998.

With hindsight, the incident at Holis in March 1999 can be seen as a forerunner to further attempts in recent years to push back against Christianity encroaching on the physical and ideological urban space. In June 2004, similar attacks on makeshift 'churches' with mainly ethnic Chinese congregations took place in Tangerang and Bogor; in October 2004 the St. Bernadette Catholic school also in Tangerang was forced to close after sustained attacks by Islamic Defenders Front (*Front Pembela Islam*). The group objected to the use of a school hall for mass, which it had been forced to do for the past ten years due to repeated rejection of its applications to build a church.

Conclusion

It is normal for the people to see and experience violence and this means that they no longer consider violence to be wrong. The people even consider that violence is one of the ways to resolve a problem (Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa).¹

Lia's family speak Indonesian, not Chinese in their home. They belong to one of the five religions of the Pancasila. They are Indonesians both legally and emotionally. However, they are also constantly reminded of their 'Chinese-ness', their 'foreign-ness'. At the local government office, the police station, school, hospital, and in dealings with others they are made to feel different, vulnerable — in need of protection. They cannot escape being 'Chinese'.

More than fifty years after the end of WWII and the signing in 1948 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, cycles of prejudice, racism, hostility and violence continue to be witnessed in countries across the globe. International organisations and governments remain impotent to prevent the escalation of these sentiments into mass violence and killings such as those in Srebrenica, East Timor, Gujarat and Darfur. The situation of the Chinese in Indonesia, though not resulting in bloodshed on the scale of any of these tragedies, nevertheless reveals much about the manipulation of discourses about violence which 'normalise' and therefore hide suffering caused by atrocities like these. The absence of a process of truth-seeking and a possibility for reconciliation further denies the suffering of victims and keeps them silenced. A conversation seeking truth between perpetrators, their victims and the institutions complicit in systematic discrimination and mass violence is imperative in order to begin to stop the cycle of uncertainty and insecurity in which minorities around the world like Lia and her family still find themselves.

Discourse and the 'Normality' of Violence

Prejudice and anti-sinicism were maintained through policy and sentiment at the highest levels of power in Indonesia. The language of the

New Order constantly questioned the position of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesian society, creating a context within which not only the government and the specialists but also the *massa* could present discrimination, prejudice and acts of violence against this minority group as justifiable, normal and in some cases, legal. The 'normality' of anti-Chinese violence in certain situations both during the New Order and after Suharto's resignation, almost erased from public and also scholarly consciousness an awareness of anti-Chinese antipathy as a motive for violence. The term 'anti-Chinese violence' was neutralised and imbued with impunity for its perpetrators. This was possible because the violence was perceived as limited, without victims or suffering. This not only allowed the state and the *massa* to escape repercussions for violent action but also enabled other Chinese Indonesians themselves to deny that violence against them was ethnically motivated.

The violence in mid-May 1998 did not fit this 'normal' version of anti-Chinese violence. It stood out from other contemporary incidents of anti-Chinese violence due to the overt political machinations surrounding it and its extreme brutality. At the same time, it was consistent by revealing how easily some elements of the public can be incited to perpetrate this type of violence. Its racialised or ethnic form showed the extent to which this type of violence was institutionalised by the New Order regime as part of the dynamics of its functioning. Once a few agents of the state, formal or informal, had moved into a locality to give a lead, the public could be easily enticed to follow.

In the period after May 1998 Indonesia became a more violent place. Conflicts, often very bloody, between civilians in Ambon, Ketapang and Banyuwangi, as well as clashes between separatists and the state, sparked a new genre of scholarship about Indonesia that sought to understand the historical context and psychological motives of extreme violence. Nevertheless, anti-Chinese violence does not obviously fit into this category of extreme events. By comparison, it appears almost routine. During the New Order and subsequently, anti-Chinese violence was directed against property only. With the notable exception of the rapes in May 1998, Chinese-Indonesian residents were not killed or maimed by their attackers. This was never, it appears, the intention.

Journalists, researchers and other observers are inclined to concentrate on those acts of violence which are more brutal and bloody. Acts of violence against Chinese property are thereby downgraded or set apart in another category. One would not need to go back too far however, in Indonesia's modern history to find cases of more brutal

anti-Chinese violence in the form of mass expulsions and killings in West Java in 1959, in Aceh in 1966 and West Kalimantan in 1967 — but this is a dangerous path. To seek out and give more emphasis to bloodier episodes of violence would legitimise a discourse according to a ‘scale of gruesomeness’. Such a relativist discourse would create a space in which some types of ethnic or communal violence were given more weight than others and, albeit implicitly, ‘normalise’ low-level violence. Arguably, in Indonesia this normalisation has already occurred to some extent. Lawyer and anti-discrimination activist, Esther Yusuf observed:

There is a kind of fiction here that it is ‘valid’ and ‘normal’ when the Chinese are victimised.... This is why most Indonesian Chinese until today choose silence even after all their possessions were robbed and burnt.²

Violence against ethnic Chinese during the transition after the end of the New Order is evidence not only that the pre-conditions remained and that the habitus of violence or ‘riot systems’ were still being employed to carry it out, but also that the wider public’s attitudes to this type of violence remained ambivalent and, consciously or not, dismissive. As the publisher of a book about violence in Kebumen in September 1998 reminds us, to overlook the lesser incidents of violence has consequences for our general sensibility about all violence:

Perhaps Kebumen is categorised as a ‘small’ event, but actually from small things we can be prepared or not prepared to face ‘big’ events ... one shop or hundreds of supermarkets, one life or hundreds of lives, they are all victims of the transition we are experiencing.³

NEW PERSPECTIVES

The ‘Limits’, Agency and Intent of Mass Violence

Some riots are caused, some bring themselves into being (Vikram Seth).⁴

While state violence may be uniform in physical and material terms, it always implicates local elements, habitus and collective memories, making each case different in significance from others (Ariel Heryanto).⁵

Scholarship on anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia recognises that the ‘order of the world’ produced under New Order rule in Indonesia

included knowledge, norms and institutions related to violence and therefore its agency. At the same time the various elements involved in ethnic violence, which are not directly political or elite driven but have their roots in the local and in human emotions, must also be understood. Recent scholarship in the field of ethnic and racial violence argues for the exploration of the various levels of agency involved in mass violence. Veena Das advises us to locate analysis of mass violence somewhere between an understanding of the individuals involved in this violence as simply running amok fuelled by ethnic and religious hatreds and controlled by puppeteers, and assigning blame to the individual to the extent that we lose sense of the ‘powerful social constraints that organise collective experience’.⁶ After a period of prolonged authoritarian rule during which violence is prominent, the local and collective memory of violence makes it impossible to draw a line of responsibility between the rulers and their victims.

The violence insinuates itself into the economy, domestic life, language and consciousness. It does more than penetrate every space: it pursues the colonized even in sleep and dream. It produces a culture; it is a cultural praxis.

All this might be called the spirit of violence. This spirit makes the violence omnipresent ⁷

In a statement made by Imam Riyanto, a resident of Gresik, East Java after the violence in May 1998, we are given some clues to the intent or motives for ‘ordinary’ people to act violently and the conceptualisations of ethnic Chinese they may have held in the late 1990s in Indonesia:

If the government does not solve the economic crisis, the next time the riots will be even worse Even so, while people would take things and burn the shops, we wouldn’t actually hurt the Chinese.⁸

Imam’s comment reveals what he perceives as the ‘limits’ of anti-Chinese violence. It shows how this form of violence — the looting and burning of Chinese-owned shops — was carried out with the perception that it was not actually hurting Chinese. This behaviour fell within the bounds of social acceptability. As Siegel observes, “‘Chinese’ ... was a word that permitted massive theft.”⁹ Imam also confirms the hypothesis that racial violence falls into different levels with regard to intent. In the case of violence against Chinese in Indonesia, the intention was to

render this group subordinate and inferior, but never to destroy it entirely. To do so would effectively destroy the foundations of the majority group's domination.

During the transitional period after the fall of Suharto, Sidel observed that the 'anti-Chinese riot' largely disappeared from government and public rhetoric, despite the abundance of 'military conspiracies and "communal" conflicts'.¹⁰ However, events of violence against Chinese did not cease. The violence against Chinese that occurred after the fall of Suharto, in particular, highlights this need to challenge our understandings of the agency and intent of those responsible for it. The cases after May 1998 show that anti-Chinese violence was a continued expression of the same local particularities — systems, motives and agents — that had facilitated it previously. The national rhetoric may have changed, but local realities had not. Within a '(re)democratising' but incredibly weak Indonesia, the people were given the power, at last, to speak and act for themselves, with varied outcomes.¹¹ The violence can be seen as an expression of 'people power', as a struggle for justice against corruption, for equality and also for a greater role for Islam. Yet these new popular demands still drew on the wellspring of old ethnic prejudices. After May 1998, anti-Chinese violence became part of the national experience and discourse of reform and justice-seeking.

Challenge the Silence

The representations of mass violence profoundly impact on the potential for future prosecutions, rehabilitation and reconciliation within the communities in which it takes place. There is a vast literature regarding processes of healing after events of mass violence with the goal of reconciliation. In large part this scholarship argues that a truth seeking and reconciliation process 'offers a means of making sense and interpreting the experience of marginalised peoples and forgotten histories'.¹² However, as E.L. Kornfield found with regard to the impact on victims of the Truth Commission in Chile in 1992, this re-telling is also often fraught with risk. Kornfield's study revealed that it was not unusual for victims who testified to the Chilean Commission to later regret it and wish for a return to the 'silence'.¹³ Furthermore, the subjectivity of these stories, which are coloured by trauma, ongoing fears, and the distance of time, causes doubt in the minds of many about their validity as 'truth'.¹⁴ Yet, in spite of the potential risks to the victim and also the ethical dilemmas facing those who write the histories of violence, others argue that the

alternative to not hearing the stories of suffering means limiting our potential to understand.¹⁵ For example, writing about the experiences of widows of the Guatemala civil war, Judith Zur highlights the dangers of failing to provide an explanation for this suffering for victims:

Individuals unable to escape suffering are isolated within their own physical and emotional conditions, deprived of any vehicle through which their experience can be made meaningful and, therefore, sufferable. The grief experienced by people who cannot explain an ordeal is more intense than that of others who can explain and thus integrate their past.¹⁶

The ‘normalisation’ of violence against Chinese Indonesians, as Esther Yusuf observed, means that the victims choose silence over testimony. Ethnic Chinese victims are caught between the debates articulated here — to speak and perhaps risk more hurt, or to remain silent, as most do, and endure the continued cycle of fear and isolation. The impunity accorded to perpetrators of anti-Chinese violence disregards the possibility of suffering. In turn, the failure of Chinese Indonesian victims to speak about their suffering has allowed this perception to continue. As an ethnic group, they are seen as emotionless and economically resilient. Chinese Indonesians themselves search for explanations for the violence other than their ethnicity. After all, many do not even perceive themselves to be ethnically Chinese. Once violence is labelled ‘ethnic violence’, the recovery and healing of this small minority within the wider general community is much more difficult than if it is viewed to be a consequence of political scheming or even economic instability. These are externally controlled elements and once put right, life can return to normal. On the other hand, an explanation of the violence in terms of ethnicity might ‘have meant a deep rupture on the conventional story of Chinese engagement in Indonesian society’.¹⁷

When narrating the violence of May 1998, Solo residents and local leaders evoked memories of previous violence in that city. They argued that there was an historical cycle of such violence, so deeming the 1998 violence ‘inevitable’, with the consequence that no one was called on to take responsibility for it. Equally, Solo’s Chinese used this same set of memories to argue that the 1998 violence was not anti-Chinese. Ethnicity was erased in favour of explanations of it as due to state violence, local crime and economic competition. This approach, it can be said, will most probably mean that violence against Chinese will occur there again in the future. The reluctance of Chinese Indonesians and *pribumi* alike

to face up to the ethnic and racial component of this violence means that neither side has moved to alter their behaviour. They are at the mercy of the inevitable 'cycles'.

For ethnic Chinese all over Indonesia, a process of reconciliation will to a degree require admission by them of their part in creating conditions leading to continued prejudice and economic jealousy among *pribumi*. Larger gates around ever-larger houses will only make such a process more difficult. Though still few there are some encouraging signs of Chinese Indonesians attempting to understand the reasons for the prejudices against them and engaging with other groups to this end.¹⁸ Conversely, as seen in the violence in Situbondo and Tasikmalaya in 1996–97, by putting emphasis on its ethnic component a context was created within which the violence in Rengasdengklok and years later, in Jakarta and other cities, easily followed. In these cases focusing on the racialised nature of the violence allowed the state to continue to engage in discrimination and prejudice against the minority by (thinly) disguising them as measures to limit divisions and conflicts.

Whether these acts of violence against ethnic Chinese were described as anti-Chinese violence, as state terrorism, premanism or by some other name, they had in common the assurance of impunity for the perpetrators and therefore their participation. The responses by the state, the masses and ethnic Chinese to the violence were either to erase the ethnic component — 'The state did it' — or to essentialise it — 'They asked for it'. Neither of these representations results in analysis that can satisfactorily explain the agency of the state, the suffering of its victims nor motives of the perpetrators or of the crowd that joins in an event of mass violence, and therefore cannot be a basis for justice or reconciliation.

Whither the Victim?

(F)or the historian, the imperative (is) of rendering as truthful an account as documents and testimonials will allow, without giving in to the temptation of closure. Closure in this case would represent an obvious avoidance of what remains indeterminate, elusive and opaque (Saul Friedlander).¹⁹

As already mentioned, the ability of the discourse and representations of 'anti-Chinese violence' to render it victimless is an important part of its rationale. The suffering of Chinese Indonesians is nothing compared

to the suffering and frustration experienced by those carrying out the violence, who were after all the victims of social disparity, injustices, and religious defamation. The ethnic Chinese victim is non-existent and thereby is given no expression. The architects of this 'programme' for social control saw this silence as essential. Why else would they have felt so threatened by Marthadinata, a suspected rape victim from May 1998? She was murdered in her home only days before she was due to give testimony before an international audience. Why else would victims of May 1998 and their supporters be threatened against reporting the crimes to police or speaking out about them at all? Hearing stories of suffering from victims confronts the audience with the untruth that anti-Chinese violence has no repercussions. As Imam's comments above demonstrate, this is clearly the dominant perception.

The study of the processes, politics and outcomes of the Joint Team report on the May 1998 violence demonstrated the subjectivity of truth about an event of mass violence, particularly one involving the state. It was also an attempt to follow the advice of Friedlander, himself a Holocaust historian, to avoid 'closure' on the history of such events. One of the areas of 'truth' closed off after the Joint Team report and in the wake of public responses to the violence was the testimonials and accounts of victims and their guardians. Statistics, semantics, and political wrangling dominated discourse of this tragedy, subverting the experiences of victims, particularly those who suffered sexual violence, declaring their experiences unverifiable and leaving them uncounted. In her study on the ways of resolving and remembering mass violence, Martha Minow highlights the potential that such horror might be perpetuated for its victims owing to 'the destruction of the remembrance of individuals'.²⁰

The debate around the Joint Team report over who was 'verifiably' a victim created discomfort and disillusionment with the truth-seeking process. The Joint Team did not hide the fact that there were multiple truths about the violence, particularly on the question of naming the victims. Initially envisaged by *reformasi* supporters and victims of the violence as a medium through which justice could be accomplished by exposing the truth, the Joint Team report revealed the reality of Judge Goldstone's statement about the impossibility of finding 'tidy endings' after an event of mass violence. Meanwhile, elements in the government and military condemned the Joint Team report for its attempts at raising consciousness and for making recommendations. It became obvious that the team's 'truth seeking' did not go far enough for some and went too far for others.

The conceptual structures that supported the study of anti-Chinese violence have attempted to explain it in political, religious and economic terms. The suffering caused by the violence has not found a place in these accounts. As discussed throughout this study, the notion of anti-Chinese violence as limited is vital to its sustainability as an effective problem-solving method or tension-diffusing exercise. It was a situation with which Chinese and non-Chinese could, it seemed, all live.

The rapes in May 1998, however, exceeded this notion of violence with limits. The stories heard through rumour, in women's magazines and on the Internet about the violence these women had suffered, stressed its brutality. As Aguilar argues, the violence exceeded the 'limits of the tolerable',²¹ and led some Indonesians to the realisation that Chinese were indeed victims of discrimination. However, others, particularly some Islamic groups and elites in politics and the military, responded by denying that the rapes occurred, arguing that it was too extreme, too horrible to be true. Instead, politicians, religious leaders, journalists, military and police called for victims to present themselves, to speak their stories publicly. The inability of any of the victims of rape to do this due to constant threats, allowed such sentiment to remain, even despite the eventual recognition of the rapes by the Joint Team and President Habibie himself. Furthermore, responses from within the community to the very act of re-telling the victim's story, especially a victim of sexual violence, raised critical ethical questions related to the representation of suffering and levels of truth.

These interpretations of the limits to anti-Chinese violence also meant that the losses experienced by thousands of Chinese families during May 1998 and in incidents before and after this time were simply absorbed into the national consciousness. As opposed to the unlimited and unbelievable nature of the rapes — which, perversely, allowed denial — this violence, provoked or not, was normal. Further, it was widely believed that Chinese would simply rebuild their shops and homes and start over, having the means to do so. Stories of poor Chinese families, who lost their small businesses in the May 1998 violence and with it everything they had ever worked for did not fit this popular perception. A year after the violence I interviewed a family of five in Tanjung Priok, who were all living in one room. They relied on the kindness of neighbours after their uninsured electrical goods store was looted and burned and found it difficult to call on family for assistance as many of them had also suffered losses in the violence.²²

Women's and victims' groups and some scholars have made great efforts to contribute the victim's narrative to the wider representation of May 1998 and anti-Chinese violence in general. However, as a source of 'truth' they remain at the margins. Many Indonesians believe that some remembrance of Indonesia's crimes against humanity is essential to rebuilding and reconciling with the past.²³ Until now, however, the Indonesian state, scene of many horrors including torture, mass rape, kidnappings, killings and destruction of property, has remained obstinate.

(T)o remember, to convey the truth about painful events is an important prerequisite in order to heal individual victims, also in order to give restitution to the social order which was caused by these events to be in disarray (Karlina Supelli).²⁴

SOLVING THE 'CHINESE PROBLEM'?

Since the fall of Suharto, many Chinese Indonesians have taken up the challenge to participate in the 'Indonesian common project' as their right as citizens.²⁵ As well as rebuilding their premises and homes and re-establishing their businesses, they have joined political parties and formed non-government organisations together with non-Chinese. There have been some symbolic steps towards ending legal discrimination. President Abdurrahman Wahid repealed the law banning Chinese festivals in January 2001, allowing the open celebration of Chinese New Year. In February 2002 Wahid's successor, Megawati Sukarnoputri, declared Chinese New Year to be a national holiday.²⁶ However apart from this largely symbolic amendment, other discriminatory laws remain unchanged, though for the most part unenforced.

Despite continual lobbying by families of the May 1998 victims supported by human rights groups, the Joint Team's recommendations for repeal of all laws discriminating against Chinese Indonesians still await implementation. In November 2001 the Parliament began debate on proposed amendments to the citizenship laws (Law No. 62/1958). The amendments would apply *jus soli*, thereby giving automatic citizenship to anyone born in Indonesia. At the time of publication, the amendment was still being considered.

The absence of any institutional process of justice and healing for victims of the violence in May 1998 stands in the way of a resolution of the 'Chinese problem' in newly democratic Indonesia. This is a process whereby perpetrators show remorse for their actions and the state makes them accountable for crimes committed against humanity.

In democratic, post-Suharto Indonesia, this process is equally important therefore for all victims of the New Order, including students killed at Semanggi in 1998 and 1999, Chinese Indonesian victims of May 1998, Muslim victims of Tanjung Priok in 1984 and the East Timorese who suffered in 1999. To fail to provide the opportunity for justice and to publicly remember these events is tantamount to saying that the suffering of these victims does not matter.

Seven years on, it is clear that Indonesia's elite no longer regards the May 1998 violence in Jakarta as a national story of great consequence, though it remains a blemish on the country's history and was politically significant at the time. Hopes were raised with legislation signed by President Abdurrahman Wahid on 23 November 2000 to establish a Human Rights Court (Law No 26 of 2000) with provision for ad hoc courts (Article 43) to hear cases that took place before the legislation was introduced. Established in August 2001, the Human Rights Court and its ad hoc provision was a critical moment in Indonesian human rights law. For victims of human rights abuses carried out during the New Order period and before November 2000, the ad hoc courts were greatly anticipated.²⁷ In 2003, Komnas HAM re-opened the investigations into the May 1998 violence, verifying once again the outcome of the Joint Team report. This was yet another attempt to bring the case before the Attorney General in the hope that an Ad Hoc court would be established to hear the case and give the victims some chance at seeing justice carried out. However, at the end of 2004 this process stalled. As the period shortly after the violence in 1998 demonstrated, efforts to identify victims and assist them in their recovery were themselves met with threats and acts of violence. This showed very clearly that some were still playing for high stakes. The failure of governments since the fall of Suharto to grant victims of May 1998, including Chinese Indonesians, women and urban poor, access to this process, leaves them as 'citizens' on the margins of Indonesian society.

Nevertheless, at an individual level the suffering experienced by Chinese Indonesian victims in common with that of *pribumi* victims has created a bond. Together they have begun to reclaim their role as citizens in the Indonesian 'common project'. This healing has not however, been universal. Whilst some Chinese Indonesians have been able to find a way for their suffering to be the means for forging bonds with *pribumi*, others are still unable to compare their losses with that of other Indonesians and it acts to set these groups further apart. A process of reconciliation and healing also challenges the ethnic Chinese community to confront

its own role in the continuing hostility. A year after May 1998, Chinese-Indonesian shopkeepers in the Jatinegara district of Jakarta were still expressing palpable anger,²⁸ revealing the fears and hatreds that continue to exist in some parts of this community and entrench alienation.

The narratives of anti-Chinese violence presented here seek to open up the conversation about the causes and the implications of persistent violence against this ethnic minority. New questions about levels of agency and intent and challenges to the idea of any violence as 'limited' and victimless may help to move this dialogue in a new and potentially productive direction. Exposure of the extent to which representations and discourses about this violence perpetuate a cycle of prejudice and insecurity should assist those already working against racism and for equality and human rights for all Indonesians. If, however, interpretations of anti-Chinese violence as a normal and valid response to certain situations and emotions continue, Chinese Indonesians will not be its only victims.

Ongoing fears and insecurities among this business class will hinder Indonesia's economic recovery and further development. The importance of encouraging Chinese Indonesian business back to Indonesia was recognised by Habibie in the early weeks of his Presidency. He and subsequent Presidents have made gestures, which though largely symbolic, have appeased many in this minority community. Despite this, many Chinese Indonesians and their businesses still choose to stay away.²⁹ The election of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in September 2004 as Indonesia's first directly elected President and his Vice President Jusuf Kalla, whilst good for political stability, was met with concerns within the Chinese Indonesian business community regarding Kalla's stated support for affirmative action for indigenous business.³⁰

The place of ethnic Chinese in Indonesian nationalism has been heavily negotiated from the outset but with very unsatisfactory outcomes. Six decades after independence and in a new era of democracy, Chinese Indonesians remain second-class citizens, with economic privileges but few political rights. As a basic matter of human rights, Chinese Indonesians who are born and live in Indonesia are entitled to enjoy full citizenship without legal ambiguity. A process of reconciliation is needed in which all citizens and institutions participate. Chinese Indonesians for their part can do much more to identify the expectations upon them and fulfil the obligations of citizenship. The solution appears deceptively simple, but it requires a new exchange of ideas about the rights and obligations of all citizens and the nature of Indonesia itself.

Appendix A

Cases of Violence against Chinese Indonesians, 1996–99

DATE	LOCATION
<i>1996</i>	
27 July	PDI headquarters, Jakarta
10 October	Situbondo (East Java)
26 December	Tasikmalaya (West Java)
<i>1997</i>	
January	Sanggau Ledo (West Kalimantan)
27 January	Tanah Abang (Jabotabek)
30 January	Rengasdengklok (West Java)
18 February	Bandung (West Java)
27 March	Pekalongan (Central Java)
23 May	Banjarmasin (South Kalimantan)
9 September	Tangerang (Jabotabek)
15 September	Ujung Pandang (Sulawesi)
<i>1998</i>	
5 January	Bandung (West Java)
12–16 January	Jember and surrounds (East Java)
24 January	Probolinggo (East Java)
26 January–3 February	Rembang, Kragan, Tuban (Central & East Java)
2 February	Pasuruan (East Java)
1–2 February	Donggala (Central Sulawesi)
2 February	Ujung Pandang (Sulawesi)
4 February	Sukarame, Bandar Lampung (West Sumatra)
6 February	Bima (West Sumbawa)
6 February	Brebes (Central Java)
8 February	Ende (Lombok)
11 February	Palu (Central Sulawesi)

12–16 February	Purwokerto, Brebes (Central Java) & Bandung, Cirebon (West Java)
13 February	Pamanukan (West Java)
13 February	Padang Siampuan (North Sumatra)
14 February	Praya (Lombok)
14 February	Kendari (Sulawesi)
14 February	Sentani (West Papua)
16 February	Pagaralam (South Sumatra)
10 May	Medan (North Sumatra)
13–14 May	Jakarta
14–15 May	Solo (Central Java)
15 June	Tegal (Central Java)
26 June	Purworejo (Central Java)
28 August	Cilacap (Central Java)
2 September	Medan (North Sumatra)
7–9 September	Kebumen (Central Java)
8–9 September	Pontianak (West Kalimantan)
15 September	Bagansiapi-api (Riau)
22 November	Ketapang (Jakarta)
4 December	Pare (South Sulawesi)
8 December	Luwu (South Sulawesi)
25 December	Poso (South Sulawesi)

1999

9 January	Karawang (West Java)
8 March	Bandung (West Java)
28 July	Ambon (Maluku)

Appendix B

Members of the Joint Fact Finding Team about the 13–14 May 1998 Riots

Chairman: Marzuki Darusman SH (Komnas HAM: National Commission for Human Rights);

Vice Chairman I: Maj.Gen. Pol Drs Marwan Paris MBA (Mabes ABRI: Armed Forces Headquarters);

Vice Chairman II: K.H. Dr Said Aqiel Siradj (NU)

Secretary: Dr Rosita Sofyan Noer MA (Bakom-PKB)

Vice Secretary I: Zulkarnain Yunus SH (Depkeh: Department of Justice)

Vice Secretary II: Asmara Nababan SH (Komnas HAM: National Commission for Human Rights)

Sri Hardjo SE (Kantor Menperta: Office of the Minister for the Role of Women)

Drs Bambang W. Soeharto (Komnas HAM: National Commission for Human Rights)

Prof Dr Saparinah Sadli (Komnas HAM: National Commission for Human Rights);

Mayjen TNI Syamsu D SH (Mabes ABRI: Armed Forces Headquarters);

Mayjen Pol Drs Da'i Bachtiar (Mabes ABRI: Armed Forces Headquarters);

Abdul Ghani SE (Deplu: Department of Foreign Affairs)

I Made Gelgel SH (Kejakgung: Attorney General's Office)

Dunidja D (Depdagri: Department of Internal Affairs)

Romo I Sandyawan Sumardi SJ (Tim Relawan: Volunteers for Humanity)

Nursyahbani Katajsungkana SH (LBH-APIK: Legal Aid Institute, Indonesian Womens Association for Justice)

Abdul Hakim Garuda Nusantara SH, LLM (Elsam: The Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy)

Bambang Widjojanto SH (YLBHI: Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation)

Ita F. Nadya (Tim Relawan: Volunteers for Humanity, resigned from the beginning)

Sub-teams and Chairs

Sub-team for Verification: Sri Hardjo SE (Chair);

Sub-team for Testimony: Dr Bambang W Soeharto (Chair);

Sub-team for Victims' Facts: Prof Dr Saparinah Sadli (Chair).

Source: Joint Fact Finding Team, Final Report About the 13–15 May 1998 Riot, Jakarta, 23 October 1998.

Appendix C

Instruction of the President of the Republic of Indonesia Number 26 1998

The President of the Republic of Indonesia,

Considering : that in order to raise the level of equality of status in the law and in government administration, to give equal rights in employment and lifestyle, rights and obligations of citizens and protection of human rights, and to strengthen the union and unity of the nation, it is seen as necessary to give directive for the means to carry this out;

Remembering: Article 4 subsection (1), Article 27, Article 28. Article 19, Article 30, Article 31 and Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution;

INSTRUCTS:

To : 1. Ministers;
2. Leaders of Non-Departmental Government Organisations;
3. Leaders of the Secretariats of the Highest/High National Organisations;
4. Governors Regional Heads Level I and Mayors Level II;

In order :

FIRST : To put an end to the use of the terms pribumi and non-pribumi in all formulations and in the implementation of policy, planning of programmes, or in carrying out government activities.

- SECOND: To give the same treatment and service to all Indonesian citizens in carrying out government services/duties, social and developmental, and to abolish differentiation/discrimination of all forms including attitudes towards Indonesian citizens based on ethnicity, religion, race in carrying out the services mentioned.
- THIRD : To consider going back and adjusting/reconciling all regulations and laws, policy, programmes and activities which until now have already been determined/passed and implemented, including amongst others the service of the distribution of permits for enterprise, finance/banking, residency (habitation), education, health, work opportunities and wage formulation/determination of earnings and other workers rights in accordance with this Presidential Instruction.
- FOURTH: Ministers, Leaders of Non-Departmental Government Organisations; Leaders of the Secretariats of the Highest/High National Organisations; Governors Regional Heads Level I and Mayors Level II should carry out the implementation of this Presidential Instruction in each sector and district in support of universal ideals and of society that carries out activities on the basis of competence.
- FIFTH : The Minister for the Coordination of Politics and Security shall coordinate the implementation of this instruction by Ministers and other figures mentioned in this Presidential Instruction.
- This Presidential Instruction comes into effect immediately upon the date of its release.

Issued in Jakarta

On the 16 September 1998

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA

Signed

Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie

Source: Himpunan Peraturan Perundang-undangan RI tahun 1998, Jakarta: Eko Jaya, 1998.

Appendix D

Instruction of the President of the Republic of Indonesia Number 4 1999

The President of the Republic of Indonesia

Considering : a: that in order to speed up the creation and strengthening of the union and unity of the nation as well as to increase the level of equality in the law and in government administration, equal rights for work/employment and lifestyle, rights and obligations as citizens and protection of human rights, the Government has already issued policy through Presidential Decree No. 56 1996 and Presidential Instruction No. 26 1998;

(i) that in order to maintain continuity, and that the Government policy mentioned should be directly effective and its objectives formed immediately, it is seen as necessary to issue this Presidential Instruction for use in carrying this out;

Remembering: Article 4 subsection (1), Article 27, Article 28. Article 19, Article 30, Article 31 and Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution;

INSTRUCTS:

To : 1. Ministers;

2. Leaders of Non-departmental Government Organisations;

3. Leaders of the Secretariats of the Highest/High National Organisations;



4. Governors Regional Heads Level I and Mayors Level II;

In order :

FIRST : a. To implement with certainty Presidential Decree No. 56 1996 about Evidence of Republic of Indonesia Citizenship and Presidential Instruction No. 26 1998 with full responsibility and in accordance with each duty and authority which amongst others determine that:

(i) The Presidential Decree about granting citizenship and its agenda stipulated that the act of taking an oath, was the basic necessity in order to complete the administrative requirements for residency.

4. The issuing of Kepres No. 56 1996, dated 9 July 1996, declared that all regulations and laws which mentioned the condition of the Letter of Evidence of Republic of Indonesia Citizenship (SBKRI) would cease to apply;

b. Based on the Instruction of the President of the Republic of Indonesia No. 26 1998, laws which prohibit and limit the study of Chinese language were immediately revoked.

SECOND: The Minister for the Coordination of Politics and Security to coordinate the implementation of this instruction and report on its progress to the President.

This Presidential Instruction comes into effect immediately upon the date of its release.

Issued in Jakarta

On the 5 May 1999

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA

Signed

Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie

Source: Himpunan Peraturan Perundang-undangan hasil reformasi di bidang politik tahun 1999, Jakarta: Media Karya Nusantara, 1999.

Glossary and Abbreviations

abangan	Javanese Muslim who incorporates elements of mysticism and respect for local spirits in his/her religious belief
ABK	Anak Buah Kapal: lit. children of the boat (crew member)
ABRI	Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia: Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia
aliran	lit. stream or current
amok	amuk
Ansor	Nahdlatul Ulama youth organisation
antar-golongan	intergroup
asli	originally from, native of
awak angkutan	bus conductor, driver
BAIS	Badan Intelijen Strategis: Strategic Intelligence Agency
<i>Bakom</i>	Badan Komunikasi Penghayatan Kesatuan Bangsa: Communication Forum for National Unity
Bakomubin	Badan Koordinasi Mubaligh se-Indonesia: Indonesian Preachers Coordinating Agency
BAKORSTANAS(DA)	Badan Koordinasi Bantuan Pemantapan Stabilitas Nasional: (Regional) Agency for the Coordination of Support for the Development of National Stability
Banser NU	Barisan Ansor Serbaguna: Ansor multi-purpose branch. An arm of the youth organisation of Nahdlatul Ulama
Baperki	Badan Permusjawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia: Consultative Body for Indonesian Citizenship
becak	pedicab, tricycle

BIA	Badan Intelijen ABRI: ABRI Intelligence Branch
BPS	Biro Pusat Statistik: Central Bureau of Statistics
Brimob	Brigade Mobil: Mobile Brigade
bromocorah	repeat offenders
buka puasa	break the fast
bukti	evidence
<i>Bulog</i>	Badan Urusan Logistik: National Distribution Agency
BUMN	Badan Usaha Milik Negara: State Operations Agency
bunuh	kill
bupati	district head, regent
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
cukong	Chinese businessman in a relationship with elite figures in military, politics
dalang	puppeteer, mastermind
Dalmas	Pengendalian Massa: Crowd Control troops
Danrem	Komandan Resort Militer: Military Resort Commander
darah	blood
Depdagri	Departemen Dalam Negeri: Department of Internal Affairs
Depkeh	Departemen Kehakiman: Department of Justice
Deplu	Departemen Luar Negeri: Department of Foreign Affairs
desa	village
DPR	Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat: Legislative Assembly
DPRD	Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah: Assembly at provincial, regional or municipal level
Dulog	Logistic Depot
dwi fungsi	dual function
ekonomi rakyat	peoples' economy
Elsam	Lembaga Studi dan Advokasi Masyarakat: The Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy
fakta	fact

fakta kebenaran	factual truth
FKKS	Forum Komunikasi Kristen Surabaya: Christian Communication Forum Surabaya
FKS	Forum Kepedulian Sosial: Social Welfare Forum
Fokus Malam	Forum Komunikasi Santri dan Generasi Muda: Communication Forum for Santri and Islamic Youths
Forum Komunikasi Korban Kerusuhan Kebumen, 7 September	Communication Forum for the Victims of the 7 September Kebumen Riot
Forum Komunikasi Untuk Reformasi	Communication Forum for Reform
FRONT	Forum for Human Rights
GANDI	Gerakan Anti Diskriminasi
Gerakan Cinta Rupiah gereja	I Love Rupiah Movement church
GKI	Indonesian Christian Church
Golkar	Golongan Karya: Functional Groups
halal	permissible
harga biasa	normal price
HNSI	Himpunan Nelayan se-Indonesia: Indonesian Fishers' Association
huaren	Chinese living outside China
ICMI	Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia: Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals
Idul Fitri	celebrations marking the end of Ramadan, the fasting month in the Islamic calendar
IMF	International Monetary Fund
Interfidei	Institut Dialog Antar Iman di Indonesia: Institute for Inter-faith Dialogue in Indonesia
Inpres	Instruksi Presiden: Presidential Instruction
Intel	Intelligence agency
IPK	Ikatan Pemuda Karya: Youth group in Medan
IPKI	Ikatan Pendukung Kemerdekaan Indonesia: League of Supporters of Indonesian Independence

ISAI	Institut Studi Arus Informasi: Institute for the Free Flow of Information
kabupaten	district, regency
Kadin	Kamar Dagang dan Industri: Chamber of Commerce and Industry
kafiran	infidel
Kalyanamitra	Women's organisation
kaki lima	street trader
kambing hitam	scapegoats
kampung	small village
Kapolda	Regional Police Chief
Kapolres	District Police Chief
kawasan	district, region
Kejakgung	Kejaksaan Agung: Attorney General's Office
kekerasan	violence
kerusuhan	riot
kiai	Islamic teacher and community leader
KH	Kiai Haji: Formal form of address for an Islamic teacher who has undertaken the Haj
KISDI	Komite Indonesia untuk Solidaritas Dunia Islam: Indonesian Committee for World Islamic Solidarity
Kodam	Komando Daerah Militer: Military Area Command
Komandan Korem	Komando Resort Militer: Military Resort Commander
Komnas HAM	Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia: National Commission for Human Rights
Komnas Perempuan	Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Perempuan: Indonesian Commission for Violence Against Women
Kontras	Komisi untuk Orang Hilang dan Korban Tindak Kekerasan: Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence
KOPASSUS	Komando Pasukan Khusus: Special Command Unit
KOPKAMTIB	Komando Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban: Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order

Koramil	Komando Rayon Militer: Military headquarters at local level
KOSTRAD	Komando Cadangan Strategis Angkatan Darat: Army Strategic Reserve
KPP HAM	Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Violations
krismon (krisis moneter)	monetary crisis of 1997–98
KTP	Kartu Tanda Penduduk: identity card
Laskar Jihad	Holy War Forces
LBH	Lembaga Bantuan Hukum: Legal Aid Institute
LBH APIK	Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Asosiasi Perempuan Indonesia untuk Keadilan: Legal Aid Institute Indonesian Womens Association for Justice
Lebaran	day of celebration at end of fasting month
LSPP	Lembaga Studi Pers dan Pembangunan: Institute for the Study of the Press and Development
Mabes	Markas Besar: Headquarters
MAKIN	Majelis Agama Konghucu Indonesia
Makostrad	Markas Komando Kostrad: Headquarters of the Army's Strategic Reserves Command
Mapolsek	Markas Polisi Sektor: local police station
masjid, mesjid	mosque
massa	masses
MATAKIN	Majelis Tinggi Agama Khonghucu Indonesia: High Council of Indonesian Confucian Religion
Menperta	Menteri Negara Peranan Wanita: Minister for the Role of Women
Mitra Perempuan	Women's Organisation
MPR	Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat: People's Consultative Assembly
Muhammadiyah	modernist Muslim organisation
MUI	Majelis Ulama Indonesia: Indonesian Ulema (Islamic teachers and clerics) Council
Muspida	Regional Security Council: Musyawarah Pemimpin Daerah
nelayan pendatang	newcomer fishermen
NGO	non-government organisation

NU	Nahdlatul Ulama: Revival of the Religious Scholars, a traditionalist Muslim organisation
ojek	motorcycle or bicycle used for public transport
oknum	shadowy figure responsible for instability
operasi pembersihan	clean-up operation
orang kaya	rich person
orang miskin	poor person
P3M	Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat: Indonesian Society for Pesantren and Community Development
PAN	Partai Amanat Nasional: National Mandate Party
Pancasila	Five basic principles of the Indonesian state (state philosophy)
Pangab	Panglima Angkatan Bersenjata: Commander of the Armed Forces
Pangdam	Regional Commander
Pangkoops Jaya	Commander of Greater Jakarta
Panglima	Commander
PBHI	Persatuan Bantuan Hukum Indonesia: Indonesian Legal Aid Group
PDI-P	Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan: Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle
pedagang	self-employed traders
pembangunan	development
pembauran	assimilation
pemuda	youth
Pemuda Pancasila (PP)	New Order Youth group
peranakan	person of Chinese descent who was born and bred in Southeast Asia
perkosaan	rape
pesantren	Islamic boarding school
PGI	Persatuan Gereja Indonesia: Union of Churches
pihak tertentu	certain party, third party
PIKI	Persatuan Intelektual Kristen Indonesia: Indonesian Association of Christian Intellectuals
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia: Indonesian Communist Party

PMII	Pengerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia: Indonesian Movement of Islamic Students
PMS	Persatuan Masyarakat Solo: Solo Community Union
Posko	coordinating, communication post
PPNC	Nusantara Fishery Harbour, Cilacap
PPP	Partai Persatuan Pembangunan: United Development Party
PR	Pemuda Rakyat: People's Youth, an affiliate of PKI
PRD	Partai Rakyat Demokrasi: People's Democratic Party
preman	thug
premanisme	gangsterism
pribumi	indigenous Indonesian
provokasi	provocation(s)
provokator	provocateur
PWS	Paguyuban Wong Solo: Association of Solonese
reformasi	reform movement
Romo	Javanese term of address for a Catholic priest
ruko	rumah, toko: shophouse
santri	devout Muslim, students of Islam
SARA	Suku, Agama, Ras, Antar Golongan: Ethnicity, Religion, Race, Intergroup relations. Topics banned for political discussion under the New Order
Satgas	Kesatuan Tugas: Security Unit
Satgas GDN	Gerakan Disiplin Nasion: Team for National Discipline
Satpam	Satuan Pengamanan: Security Unit
SBKRI	Surat Bukti Kewarganegaraan Republik Indonesia: Indonesian Citizenship Certificate
sembako	basic goods, needs
siskamling	Sistem Keamanan Lingkungan: Local Security System
SKB	Surat Keputusan Bersama: Letter of Joint Decision
suku bangsa	ethnic group
tadarusan	reading and learning the Holy Koran

TBS	Taman Budaya Surakarta: Surakarta Cultural Centre
TGPF	Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta: Joint Fact Finding Team
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia: Indonesian National Army
toke	Chinese boss, or trawler owner
toko	shop
TRuK	Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan: Volunteers Team for Humanity
tukang becak	becak driver
UHN	Universitas HKBP Nommensen: HKBP Nommensen University
ulama	Muslim religious teacher or leader
UMS	Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta: Surakarta Muhammadiyah University
UNS	Universitas Sebelas Maret: University of the 11 March
UPS	Universitas Panca Sakti: Panca Sakti University
USU	Universitas Sumatra Utara: University of North Sumarta
warung	small shop, stall
wayang	shadow play with leather puppets
WNA	Warga Negara Asing: Foreigner, alien citizen
WNI	Warga Negara Indonesia: Indonesian citizen
wong cilik	little person
YLBHI	Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia: Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation

Notes

Preface

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Chapter 2

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Indonesians of Chinese descent constitute only two to three per cent of the country's population but dominate the private business sector. Serious acts of violence against this ethnic minority occurred during Indonesia's colonial past, and after a period relatively free of such incidents became increasingly frequent during the final years of Suharto's New Order. In this first book-length study of anti-Chinese hostility during the collapse of Suharto's regime, Jemma Purdey presents a close analysis of the main incidents of violence during the transitional period between 1996 and 1999, and the unprecedented process of national reflection that ensued.

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well balanced study
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level of scholarship."

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The mass violence that accompanied the fall of the regime in May 1998 affected not only ethnic Chinese but also indigenous or pribumi Indonesians. The author places anti-Chinese riots within this broader context, considering causes and agency as well as the way violence has been represented. While ethnicity and prejudice are central to the explanation put forward, she concludes that politics, economics and religion offer additional keys to understanding why such outbreaks occurred.

Jemma Purdey is a Fellow with the Department of Political Science at the University of Melbourne, where she earned her PhD in 2002.